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In Controversy Oft: James David Bales And The Sharp Decline Of The Apocalyptic Worldview At Harding University

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IN CONTROVERSY OFT: JAMES DAVID BALES AND THE SHARP DECLINE OF THE APOCALYPTIC WORLDVIEW AT HARDING UNIVERSITY

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By

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I dedicate this thesis:

to my wife, Ashley, for her love, support, and patience.

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A portion of this thesis looks at J. D. Bales's theological heritage. It reminded me of my own background. I have spent the last twenty-one years on the pew with the people I consider my theological heritage. The last eight years I've been privileged to serve as their minister. I must thank my shepherds and the rest of my family at Cabot Church of Christ for their support through this program and for so much more. Finally, thanks to my committee for their feedback and attention to the project.

Chapter I

Introduction

James D. Bales represents a key shift in the history and theology of Churches of Christ as an example of the last stand of apocalypticism in Churches of Christ. Early in his life he was a key spokesman for it, and later against it. His counsel was sought by those on either side of the divide. This chapter defines apocalypticism and related terms. I also give a broad overview of the doctrine's trajectory in the Stone-Campbell Movement.[1] Last, I detail how the remaining chapters trace the decline of the apocalyptic worldview in Bales and at Harding University.

Barton W. Stone, Tolbert Fanning, and David Lipscomb represent leaders in the Stone-Campbell Movement who maintained what Richard Hughes has coined an "apocalyptic worldview." Such a perspective creates "an outlook on life whereby the believer gives his or her allegiance to the kingdom of God, not to the kingdoms of this world."[2] Many of

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[1] Hereafter abbreviated, SCM.

[2] Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2008), xii. Hereafter abbreviated, *RAF*. The ideas manifested in the term "apocalyptic worldview" go by various names depending on the author. The phrases, "Nashville Bible School Tradition (NBST),"

the leaders in Churches of Christ who held this worldview are characterized by a pessimistic anthropology and ecclesiology. They held human progress through secular institutions could contribute nothing to the inbreaking of the heavenly kingdom in this world.[3] They also believed that the church was only a glimpse of the kingdom and not the fullness thereof. These two points caused them to reject political and militaristic efforts aimed at justice, righteousness, and peace.[4] Instead, they worked toward these ideals in and through the church. Within Churches of Christ this apocalyptic sectarianism was once manifest in several distinct counter-cultural positions. Among these are pacifism, special providence, and an apolitical posture towards government. John Nelson Armstrong, the first president of Harding College, summed up apocalyptic sectarianism on the eve of World War I in this way: "…if one is a foreigner tonight, as I am, and his citizenship is

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"Tennessee Tradition," and "Lipscomb Tradition" all refer to the same concepts.

[3] Richard Hughes and R. L. Roberts, *The Churches of Christ*, ed. Henry Warner Bowden, *vol*. 10 Denominations in America (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001)., 61. Similarly, Hicks refers to James A. Harding as a "gracious separatist" in John Mark Hicks, "A Gracious Separatist: Moral and Positive Law in the Theology of James A. Harding," *Restoration Quarterly* 42 (2000): 129-130.

[4] See Hughes, *RAF*, 3. John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine, *Kingdom Come: Embracing the Spiritual Legacy of David Lipscomb and James Harding* (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2006), 13-15.

in heaven, as mine is, he has no obligation to any human government save the duty of a foreigner, namely, faithful obedience to the powers that be."[5] These manifestations of the apocalyptic worldview are largely deemphasized or absent from present day Churches of Christ.

The Churches of Christ underwent a dramatic shift in doctrine and self-identity after each of the World Wars. Following each war, churches increasingly reflected shifts occurring in their surrounding culture and the broader Evangelical movement. From the 1920s to the 1940s convictions related to the apocalyptic worldview declined while patriotism, self-determination, and conservative political activism increased.[6] Additionally, following the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, church sponsored colleges consistently lagged behind their state supported counterparts in desegregation. However, Churches of Christ were uniquely integrated among Southern denominations, which is evidence that remnants of the apocalyptic worldview remained following the height of its influence.[7]

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[5] L. C. Sears, *For Freedom: The Biography of John Nelson Armstrong* (Austin: Sweet Publishing, 1969), 154.

[6] Several other sociological factors such as increased affluence, education, and urbanization could also be included.

[7] Although Harrell made this claim in 1971, he notes that Churches of Christ only appeared integrated by comparison to other Southern denominations. See David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *White Sects and Black Men*

The separatism forged through apocalypticism and restorationism created some amount of interaction between white and black churches not present elsewhere.[8] Still, this slowness to integrate indicates a degrading of the unique sectarianism present in the church's apocalypticism and affected the way Churches of Christ responded to the Civil Rights Movement.

The shift away from apocalypticism is particularly acute at Harding University between the presidencies of J. N. Armstrong and George S. Benson and is easily traceable through Bales's life and writings. Bales was a student of Armstrong and later became a close associate of Benson. He inherited the apocalyptic tradition from Armstrong, but his shift away from this theological heritage closely parallels his developing relationship with Benson.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the decline of the apocalyptic worldview at Harding University via Bales's changed mind. This thesis traces Bales's move away from the

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in the Recent South (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971) 43-47. This primarily refers to the "revival culture" in Churches of Christ wherein a black or white preacher might preach to an audience of another race or both races together.

[8] Barclay Key, "Race and Restoration: Churches of Christ and the African American Freedom Struggle" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2007) 23. For more on how the apocalyptic worldview and race relations interacted with one another see, John Mark Hicks, "From Slavery to Segregation: A Case Study in Lipscomb's Political Theology," in *Resisting Babel: Allegiance to God and the Problem of Government*, ed. John Mark Hicks (Abilene: ACU Press, 2020), 59-80.

apocalyptic worldview and toward increased conformity with secular and evangelical culture through his many writings. During the 1940s, Bales changed his position on several key doctrines central to the apocalyptic worldview.[9] Among the most striking are the dismissal of pacifism, his fight against communism, advocacy for free enterprise as a Christian economic system, and his antagonism toward certain leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. The primary reason for this dramatic change, I argue, has an eschatological source. The Churches of Christ waged a fierce war against premillennialism in the 1930s and 1940s. At the time, the apocalyptic tradition was conflated with premillennial doctrine and targeted alongside it. The fight began in response to dispensational premillennialism but came to include historic premillennialism as well.

Bales is a missing link in the written record of the history of the Churches of Christ. Many historians reference him in passing but a definitive biography has yet to be written on this influential and prolific author, debater, and Bible professor. Bales is a case study in a much larger transition within Churches of Christ as they

[9] James D. Bales, *Forty Years on the Firing Line* (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, n.d.), 21.

moved from religious outsiders to insiders.[10] The shift is clear within the history of Churches of Christ at large and at Harding University in particular. The apocalyptic stream is mostly gone, and Bales represents its last stand. Much attention has been given to the role of "editor-bishops," such as Foy Wallace, Jr., in the fight against premillennialism and pacifism. Conversely, Bales is a representative of the same discussion which was occurring in the academic arena of the church.

Also, the question of a Christian's relation to civil government, participation in war, and advocacy of social issues is key to the story of James Bales and is relevant in every age. Bales is an important case study because he wrote about his convictions on both sides of nearly all these issues. Early in his life, Bales strongly reflected the apocalyptic worldview. Sometime during the 1940s he jettisoned this heritage and became a fierce opponent of it.

[10] Michael Casey, "From Religious Outsiders to Insiders: The Rise and Fall of Pacifism in the Churches of Christ," *Journal of Church and State* 44:3 (Sum 2002): 455-475.

Basic Assumptions and Rationale

I will assume the basic correctness of theses from several prominent historians of the Stone-Campbell Movement generally and Churches of Christ in particular. All the following deal with ways to categorize various sources of and shifts in the Movement's theology.

While the ideas of restoration and unity are widely accepted as the twin pillars of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Toulouse also considers eschatology important:

> The eschatological principle among early Disciples is certainly deserving of consideration as one of the most important marks of their early identity, equally significant to, if not in some ways more formative than their commitment to biblical interpretation, restorationism, and church unity.[11]

Hughes is reflective of Toulouse's thesis. He notes Campbell's postmillennial optimism and Stone's apocalyptic pessimism as important sources of theological development in Churches of Christ.[12] Bales's own eschatology reflects the tension that began in these early leaders and came to head in the premillennial controversy, especially in the 1930s and 1940s.

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[11] See Mark G. Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship: The Shaping of Contemporary Disciples Identity* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 101-102

[12] Hughes, *RAF*.

David Edwin Harrell's sociological rationale for the split between the Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ is also significant. In 1906, the year of the formal separation, the Disciples of Christ were primarily northern, urban, and wealthy. The Churches of Christ, mostly south of the Mason-Dixon Line, were rural and poorer.[13] Bales reflects this inherited reality in his own restorationism, aversion to liberalism, and attitude toward the Civil Rights Movement.

This project focuses on Bales's shift from his apocalyptic theological heritage to a posture of conservative political activism. To start, I trace the roots of the apocalyptic tradition from Campbell, Stone, Fanning, and Lipscomb. Next, I turn to the loss of the apocalyptic perspective at Harding University as a result of the transition of the presidency from Armstrong to Benson. Special attention is given to Bales's relationship with Benson as it causes and affects Bales's changed mind. Chapter Three is a biographical sketch of Bales providing context from which to evaluate the remainder of the thesis. Finally, I analyze Bales's theology in three major areas

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[13] David Edwin Harrell, "The Sectional Origins of Churches of Christ," in *American Origins of Churches of Christ: Three Essays on Restoration History*, ed. Douglas A. Foster (Abilene: ACU Press, 2000), 45-64.

which evidences the loss of the apocalyptic perspective at Harding University and in his thinking. These are the kingdom of God, politics, and race.

Definitions

Pacifism may be broken down into varying types or categories, but because this project only references pacifism as a manifestation of the apocalyptic perspective these distinctions are outside my purview. Within the scope of this paper, pacifism only refers to refusing to engage in combat on behalf of the state. I do not give attention to the nuances of such terms as nonresistance, noncombatant, or conscientious objection. Bales is largely unnuanced in his usage of these terms as well. For example, he makes no effort to distinguish between Martin Luther King's social nonviolence and the sectarian conscientious objection of Bales's early years.[14]

The doctrine of the millennium is important for understanding Bales's eschatology and the shift away from the apocalyptic worldview. The ouster of premillennialists from Churches of Christ was a watershed moment in this

[14] Cf. James D. Bales, *The Martin Luther King Story* (Tulsa: Christian Crusade Publications, 1967) and James D. Bales, *Christ's Teaching on War* (Berkeley: J. D. Bales, c.1943).

stream of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Early leaders of the SCM and those who represent the Nashville Bible School Tradition were historic premillennialists. Robert H. Boll was a dispensational premillennialist and bore the brunt of the attack on premillennialism in Churches of Christ. Attackers of premillennialism made little effort to distinguish between the doctrines. Still, we should offer some details regarding their differences. Erickson offers the following details:

> Dispensationalists hold to a continuing unconditional covenant of God with national Israel, so that when God has completed his dealings with the church, he will return to his relations with national Israel. All the prophecies and promises regarding Israel will be fulfilled with in the millennium….
> Nondispensationalists [historic premillennialism] put much less emphasis on national Israel, holding instead that Israel's special place, being spiritual in nature, will be found within the church.[15]

Conclusion

The apocalyptic tradition is a legacy worth appreciation and preservation that is largely absent among present-day Churches of Christ. Its death, exemplified by the shift Bales undergoes, should be examined for its causes and effects. The cause for the loss of many of the doctrines contained in an apocalyptic perspective, I

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[15] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 1218.

propose, is in their conflation with dispensational premillennialism. I aim to tease out this unnecessary fusion of doctrines in order to bring to light an important theological shift that occurred in James Bales and at Harding University. This will also show that an apocalyptic worldview may be held along with an amillennial eschatology.

The shift away from apocalypticism in Churches of Christ helps explain its current place in history. A present-day member of Churches of Christ would have difficultly self-identifying their theological inheritance without an awareness of the dramatic changes that occurred in twentieth-century Churches of Christ. This thesis lends some aid to that understanding by showing, for instance, how Cordell Christian College could be a martyr for pacifist convictions but its successor college, Harding University, would become a powerful propaganda tool for the conservative political cause. This subject is important for Churches of Christ still today as they navigate the always troubled waters of the church's relation to the state and culture.

Chapter II

The Rise and Fall of the Apocalyptic Worldview in Churches of Christ

James David Bales's theology of the kingdom of God and amillennialism is the headwater from which much of his theology flows.[1] I will first trace his eschatological and apocalyptic inheritance within the SCM through four of the major church statesmen in the first three generations: Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, Tolbert Fanning, and David Lipscomb.[2] After surveying these early leaders, I turn to eschatological developments at Harding University from the beginning of J. N. Armstrong's presidency to the end of George S. Benson's. Here, I will survey the stark differences in eschatology and leadership styles of Armstrong and Benson. The primary issues related to the apocalyptic tradition that are manifest in this story are the freedom to disagree (evidenced primarily in the

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[1] Mark G. Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship: The Shaping of Contemporary Disciples Identity* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 101-102. Hereafter abbreviated, *JD*..

[2] The selection of these men comes from Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2008) and Richard T. Hughes, "The Apocalyptic Origins of the Churches of Christ and the Triumph of Modernism" in *American Origins of Churches of Christ: Three Essays on Restoration History*, ed. Douglas A. Foster (Abilene: ACU Press, 2000), 65-107. *Reviving the Ancient Faith* is hereafter abbreviated *RAF* and *American Origins of Churches of Christ* is hereafter abbreviated *AO*.

premillennialism controversy), the Christian's duty to government, pacifism, and special providence. As far as it is possible, I will analyze both presidents in tandem through each topic, narrating this theologically driven history. Prior to the 1940s, Bales more closely resembles the theology of Stone, Fanning, Lipscomb, and Armstrong. Then, as his relationship with Benson develops, his theology morphs to include an optimism reminiscent of Campbell's.

A study to locate Bales within the trajectory of the movement is needed because, despite his significant influence and prolific output, little has been done to understand his theology. This chapter offers Bales's eschatological heritage as a framework for understanding his work which helped shift the collective thought in Churches of Christ on several issues. I will show that the present rule of the kingdom of Christ was Bales's integrative motif.[3] The application of this motif became his major focus in terms of a Christian's relationship and role as a resident of the earthly kingdom yet a citizen of the heavenly one. Over his career he addressed nearly every

[3] "The integrative motif is the central idea that provides the thematic perspective in light of which all other theological concepts are understood and given their relative meaning or value." Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 20-21.

major issue facing Churches of Christ and many in the culture at large. The present rule of the kingdom of Christ was both his motivation and basis for argument.

It is beneficial to first locate his eschatology within the history of the movement because of the SCM's bent toward restorationism. The church, the kingdom of God, the millennium, and restoration of the ancient order are related doctrines in the SCM. Eschatological debates existed from the Movement's onset and all four major views of the millennium are represented in the history of Churches of Christ.[4] Each view has far reaching effects on doctrines which lay downstream. Postmillennialists, for instance, argue that the church will usher in the kingdom through progress in society, innovations, science, and technology. Postmillennialists, therefore, are generally optimistic about the present world. This view has thrived historically when Christianity is spreading, such as in the years following Constantine or the dawn of the New World. Consequently, they also see a close relationship between church and state. Campbell is the predominate postmillennialist in SCM history.

[4] Toulouse, *JD*, 101-102. Dan G. Danner, "The Millennium in the Restoration Movement," *Leaven* 7, no. 4 (1999): 189-193.

Premillennialists see the present world and the future kingdom fundamentally at odds and argue that only Christ can inaugurate his kingdom (the millennium). As a result, "they manifest less identity between the kingdom of God and civil politics."[5] Many early leaders of the SCM were premillennial, including Stone, Lipscomb, and James A. Harding.[6] The fight to oust premillennialists is a major theme that "virtually consumed Churches of Christ from 1915-1940."[7] Although dispensational premillennialism was the major foe (as seen in the case of R. H. Boll), those who held to historic premillennialism were also attacked.

The majority view in Churches of Christ following the premillennial controversy into the present day is amillennialism. Bales is the only amillennialist within the scope of this paper and he also believed the reign of Christ began at Pentecost. The millennial age is now and Christ rules from his heavenly throne. Like premillennialists, they share a discontinuous view of the kingdom and the world. Amillennialists fall somewhere between the other two millennial perspectives on cultural, social, and political engagement.

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[5] Norman L. Geisler, "A Premillennial View of Law and Government," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-Sept. 1985): 250-251.

[7] Hughes, *RAF*, 137.

Early Leaders

Campbell was a quintessential optimistic postmillennialist with a unique purpose aimed at the restoration of the church. He believed that restoring the NT church would lead to the unity of all Christians, which would precipitate the evangelization of the world, which would in turn inaugurate the millennial reign of Christ (from heaven) and lead to his return. The name of his second journal, *The Millennial Harbinger*, highlights his emphasis. Campbell was optimistic about the coming millennium and saw evidence of Christ's increasing reign in worldly progress.[8] Nineteenth century postmillennialism was optimistic about human progress religiously and socially but also, at times, connected it to the Americanization of the world. Campbell shared such enthusiasm.[9]

For the majority of his life Stone also believed that the millennial dawn was near. At least three aspects of the revival culture of the Second Great Awakening influenced Stone's anticipation of the coming kingdom: their ecumenical nature, the spread of antislavery sentiment, and

[8] Hughes, RAF, 30.

[9] Toulouse, *JD*, 105.

a newfound sense of Scripture's clarity.[10] Interestingly, Stone drew similar conclusions as Campbell without sharing his rationalism. The ecumenicism he experienced in the revivals was simply part of the culture of the Western frontier that softened denominational lines, not because all returned to the Scriptures (interpreted in a Scottish Common Sense and Baconian fashion) to restore early Christianity. Stone remained active in efforts to recolonize African slaves for much of his life. At one point he was president of a recolonization society and petitioned for its support within the pages of his journal. True to early American Calvinism he had anguished over the question of his salvation, but in the revivals became convinced that God granted sinners the willingness to respond in faith through the preaching of the gospel instead of through God's unconditional election.[11] Campbell, conversely, deduced that salvation was the result of obedience to the commands of Scripture. As time dragged on and Christianity remained divided, slavery persisted,[12] and

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[10] D. Newell Williams, "Barton Stone in 1904: From Port Tobacco to Cane Ridge," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 7 (Fall 2004): 205-6

[11] Campbell also drifted away from this conception of salvation, see John Mark Hicks, "'God's Sensible Pledge:' The Witness of the Spirit in the Early Baptismal Theology of Alexander Campbell," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 1 (Spring 1998): 5-26.

[12] Campbell was a proponent of gradual emancipation of slaves.

the rise of Jacksonian politics unveiled more interest in service to the earthly kingdom than the kingdom of God, Stone became increasingly pessimistic. Notably, Stone's apocalypticism and premillennialism only came out strongly late in his life. Harrell argues, "Stone's views on non-participation in civil government did not come center stage until 1842, just two and a half years before his death."[13] Fanning, however, would embrace this side of Stone's theology and make it part of the psyche of the SCM in the Middle Tennessee area.

Fanning shared Stone's apocalyptic outlook and premillennialism.[14] Still, he criticized those who waited for an additional dispensation to be revealed and who

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[13] David Edwin Harrell, Jr., "The Legacy of Barton W. Stone's Millennialism in the Churches of Christ," *Discipliana* 61:3 (Fall 2001): 85-6. See also, D. Newell Williams, "From Trusting Congress to Renouncing Human Governments: The Millennial Odyssey of Barton W. Stone," *Discipliana* 61:3 (Fall 2001): 73ff. This is an important revision to Hughes' thesis concerning the nature of and connection between his premillennialism and apocalyptic outlook. Hughes' emphasis is only evident in the years immediately before Stone's death. Of Hughes, Harrell rightly notes, "his writing sometimes seems to link this apocalyptic outlook rather inseparably with the premillennial movement within Churches of Christ." Harrell, "Legacy," 85. "Stone's premillennial interest was always linked to other more fundamental concerns, particularly his lifelong passion to Christian union. Stone's attraction to premillennialism was tied directly to his disappointmentment and loss of hope about antislavery movements, the ominous influx of Catholic immigrants…, and his deepening despair over the failure of all efforts to attain Christian union." Harrell, "Legacy," 86.

[14] Tolbert Fanning, "The Coming of the Lord," *Gospel Advocate* 8 no. 38 (September 18, 1866) 602. Tolbert Fanning, "Reply," *Christian Review* 3 (July 1846): 156.

prayed, "Thy kingdom come."[15] He said, "The idea of a spiritual body [the church] competent to save from sin, and qualify the saved for immortality, has not entered their hearts; but they still look for Christ to divide lands and govern bloody monarchies."[16] Instead, Fanning held that Christ's kingdom, by which he also meant the church, was established in the days of the apostles and would triumph over the earthly kingdoms in some future day.[17] Of the unrestored church he said, "The sin of the present religious world seems to consist in giving the Church no higher position than the governments of the earth."[18]

Fanning also came to similar results on restorationism. To him, there was a hard line between the spiritual kingdom and the kingdoms of this world that should make the church countercultural. In this respect, Fanning is an interesting mix of Campbell and Stone. He

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[15] Tolbert Fanning, "The Mission of the Church of Christ," *The Living Pulpit of the Christian Church: A Series of Discourses, Doctrinal and Practical*, ed. W. T. Moore (Cincinnati:R. W. & Co., 1868) 518. Hereafter, "Mission."

[16] Fanning, "Mission," 518-19.

[17] Fanning, "Mission," 520-1. He also states here, "But are we required to show that the Church and kingdom are identical? Jesus said, 'On this rock I will build my Church,' and, with the word still hanging upon his lips, added, 'I will give unto thee (Peter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven.' Further proof of the identity of the Church and kingdom can not be necessary."

[18] Fanning, "Mission," 529.

held to Campbell's rational, patternistic restorationism, but Stone's apocalyptic outlook. If Campbell's restoration vision was "separation from the denominations," Stone's was "separation from the world."[19] Fanning's vision included both and found equal depravity in all man-made institutions – religious, political, or otherwise. To this end, he praised Luther, Calvin, and Wesley for their work rooting out ecclesial corruption but complained that they did not see the necessity in "returning to the ancient order of things." [20]

David Lipscomb is labeled as "clearly the most influential person among Churches of Christ from the close of the Civil War until his death in 1917."[21] He skillfully synthesized the theologies of these earlier leaders. Lipscomb inherited, via Fanning, Campbell's rationalism and sectarianism and Stone's vision of kingdom living and premillennialism.[22] He was also the last major church leader to remain faithful to this unique combination of Stone and

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[19] Hughes, *RAF*, 95. See also, Tolbert Fanning, "Restoration vs. Sectarianism: 'Discourse,'" *Gospel Advocate* 147 (January 1, 2005): 27.

[20] Fanning, "Mission," 533-4. Tolbert Fanning, "Unity Through Restoration: 'Discourse,'" *Gospel Advocate* 147 (January 1, 2005): 21. Tolbert Fanning, "Salvation Only in Christ and His Church: 'Discourses,'" *Gospel Advocate* 147 (January 1, 2005): 33.

[21] Hughes, *RAF*, 119.

[22] For a more detailed description of how Lipscomb was influenced by Stone, Campbell, and Fanning see, Hughes, *RAF*, 119-122

Campbell's perspectives. In the last years of his life, and for several decades after, Churches of Christ sought an expulsion of premillennialists.[23] The apocalyptic worldview that was begun by Stone and hardened in Fanning, however, was the baby thrown out with the premillennial bathwater. Bales and others like him would carry only a remnant of the Lipscomb tradition with them which faded over time. While much of the apocalyptic worldview died with Bales's generation, the kingdom idea persists in Bales and into the (largely) monolithic amillennial Churches of Christ thereafter. Bales very much took a cue from Lipscomb's emphasis on the kingdom when he attacked Boll's premillennialism years later. Both Lipscomb and Bales equated the kingdom and the church.

Since Bales also equated the kingdom of God and the church, he believed all things should be brought under Christ's rule *through* it.[24] But Bales differed from Lipscomb in at least two important ways. Bales, in good Campbellite fashion, was more positive about the ongoing strength of

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[23] Hughes, *RAF*, 120-121.

[24] "…every institution, kingdom, and organism of earth, save this kingdom of the God of heaven, this church builded [sic] by Jesus Christ, shall be engulfed in the vortex of everlasting ruin. This church or kingdom alone shall never perish. All these kingdoms of earth shall be broken in pieces and consumed by the kingdom of God which alone shall stand forever." Lipscomb, *CG*, 61

the church. Lipscomb believed the church would always exist but at times it would be "weak, feeble, and unpromising….prevailed against, overrun, brought to the verge of ruin, to the jaws of death-to the very gates of hell itself."[25] The other major difference develops in Bales over time. Early in his life he affirmed the apocalyptic worldview including pacifism and governmental non-involvement, and special providence, but eventually shed these aspects of the Lipscomb tradition.

Lipscomb's restorationism is separatism from society, unlike Campbell and the early Stone. Whereas Stone and Campbell optimistically affirmed progress and believed that societal changes were signs of the times, Lipscomb linked primitivism to a mix of biblical patternism and separation from the world. The church would only reach its "primitive purity" through a "return to this clearly established principle of the separation of all its members from world governments," the goal of which was to bring the world back to its "primitive and pristine allegiance to God."[26] Bales was certainly an heir of the apocalyptic vision, "it is clear that he was influenced by the

[25] Lipscomb, *CG*, 26.

[26] Lipscomb, 128, 46-47.

Lipscomb/Harding/Armstrong tradition, but it is also clear he made a radical about-face."[27]

Eschatology has played an important role since the early days of the SCM, but always with a unique nod toward restorationism. At times, it was manifest in an optimistic postmillennialism which anticipated social transformation and world evangelism ushering in the kingdom, as with Campbell. One of the results of this optimism was the zeal with which he applied Scottish Common Sense and Baconian thought to Scripture. This resulted in a rigid biblicism and patternism. Stone's optimism waned toward the end of his life and his premillennialism gave birth to his apocalyptic worldview which drew a hard line between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Fanning carried this worldview into his day without being particularly concerned with the millennium question. He shunned Christians' participation in war and civil government and solidified the apocalyptic perspective within his sphere of influence. Lipscomb, his mentee, was a patchwork of former generations. From Campbell, he inherited rationalistic, Baconian interpretative methods. He carried on Stone's premillennialism and Fanning's more

[27] Richard T. Hughes, email to author, April 29, 2019.

developed apocalyptic perspective. The synthesis resulted in a sort of anti-institutionalism with deep concern for the poor and separation from both the world and the denominations; a view termed "apocalyptic sectarianism" by Hughes and Roberts.[28] As we will see in later chapters, parts of Bales's theology may be traced back to these early leaders.

Harding University

Now we turn to the transition at Harding College (now University). The apocalyptic worldview was a casualty of the transition between the first two presidents of Harding, John Nelson Armstrong and George Stuart Benson, from 1924 to 1965.[29] Although both were educated in the Nashville Bible School Tradition (NBST), Armstrong's tenure as president was marked by the apocalyptic worldview and

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[28] Richard T. Hughes and R. L. Roberts, *The Churches of Christ* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 69. Anthony Dunnavant, "David Lipscomb and the "'Preferential Option for the Poor' among Post-Bellum Churches of Christ," in *Poverty and Ecclesiology: Nineteenth-Century Evangelicals in Light of Liberation Theology*, ed. Justo Gonzalez (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992).

[29] These dates coincide with the beginning of Armstrong's presidency at the inception of Harding College to the retirement of Benson. Opponents of Armstrong would wrap issues of kingdom theology and premillennialism together. 1915 is the date the premillennial front-page editor, R. H. Boll was ousted from the *Gospel Advocate*. Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2008), 137.

Benson's was not.[30] I will look at each individual's background and education in the apocalyptic worldview, trace its decline within their presidencies, and analyze the impact it had on the institution they ran.

Harding College formed 1924 with the merger of Arkansas Christian College and Harper Christian College in Kansas. The new college inherited Arkansas Christian's campus in Morrilton and Harper's president, J. N. Armstrong. The two then came under the name of Harding College. Armstrong stood solidly in the NBST. He was a former student (and the son-in-law) of James A. Harding and was heavily influenced by him and David Lipscomb. Lipscomb and Harding co-founded the Nashville Bible School (now Lipscomb University) and Harding served as its president. Harding's primary theological concern was to live as a citizen of the kingdom of God. This affected every aspect of his thinking and led him to the important conclusions that are at issue here: premillennialism, freedom to disagree, governmental noninvolvement, and special providence.

[30] Additionally, NBST, Harding-Lipscomb tradition, Tennessee Tradition and apocalyptic tradition/worldview are all used to refer to the kingdom theology taught by James A. Harding and David Lipscomb at the Nashville Bible School. The degree to which the apocalyptic worldview situated itself in Benson's psyche is unknown.

The premillennial controversy, which racked the whole fellowship, plagued Armstrong for nearly the entirety of his presidency.[31] The brand of premillennialism that proved controversial was primarily spread by R. H. Boll, who is covered more thoroughly in chapter four. Although Armstrong disagreed with him on particular issues, he refused to condemn him. Boll was also a student at NBS where he picked up Harding's basic theological framework for premillennialism. Later, he added to it the dispensationalism present in the broader evangelical culture.[32] He eventually became the chief target of those who sought to rid the Churches of Christ of premillennialism, whether dispensational or not.[33] Its heavy focus on grace, reliance on God, and anthropological

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[31] Premillennialism is, "The belief that Christ will return and then set up his earthly kingdom for a period of one thousand years. Some premillennialists hold that this period need not be exactly one thousand calendar years." Millard Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 158.

[32] Hughes, 143. For more on Boll's premillennialism see, R. H. Boll and H. Leo Boles, "Proposition V. Christ's Coming Premillennial and Imminent," *Unfulfilled Prophecy: A Discussion on Prophetic Times* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1954), R. H. Boll, *The Millennium* (Hammond, LA: Church of Christ Bible Chair, 1940), and R. H. Boll, *Pre-Millennialism – What Is It?* (Louisville: Word and Work, 1936). Dispensationalism is defined as, "A system of biblical interpretation and of theology that divides God's working into different periods that he administers on difference bases. It involves a literal interpretation of Scripture, a distinction between Israel and the church, and a premillennial, pretribulational eschatology." Erickson, 51.

[33] Or "Bollism" as it was referred to derogatorily in Churches of Christ.

pessimism, became a target following the split with the Disciples of Christ in 1906 and at the start of World War I. The Churches of Christ lost many of their assets in the split with the Disciples of Christ, including wealth, buildings, people, and social standing. Premillennialism, which opponents inappropriately wrapped together with political noninvolvement and pacifism, brought the risk of losing even more because of the social popularity of the war. Thus, it became a non-option to many in Churches of Christ who sought to salvage the group's social standing.[34] Boll's *Christian Word and Work* was a chief herald of the premillennial position and thus a chief target of opponents.

Although Armstrong did not agree with all the tenets embraced by Boll, they were superimposed on him because Armstrong espoused the NBST.[35] He not only carried on the premillennial views of Harding, but also Harding's political noninvolvement and pacifism. To many these views were related. Some of Armstrong's principle opposition came

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[34] David Edwin Harrell, The Sectional Origins of Churches of Christ," in *American Origins of Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster (Abilene: ACU Press, 2000), 58. Douglas A. Foster, "A Fundamentalist-Modernist Crisis in Churches of Christ: The Premillennial Controversy, 1910-1940," *Restoration Quarterly* 62:1 (2020): 21.

[35] S. H. Hall, "Harding College," *Gospel Advocate* 70 (November 22, 1928): 1109.

from Little Rock preachers, starting with E. M. Borden, editor of *Herald of Truth*. When Armstrong moved his journal, *Living Messenger*, to Morrilton, Borden published an article accusing Armstrong of being a Bollite. He then asked to meet with the Bible faculty at Harding College to determine their opinions on two issues: 1) whether the Jews would return to Palestine where Christ would rule over them upon his return, and 2) if Christ's thousand-year reign would take place on earth. No faculty member affirmed the first statement, but one did affirm the second. He was asked to resign upon fear that the board of trustees would not renew his contract.[36] Even so, Armstrong remained a target of anti-Bollites until his death. This, coupled with his refusal to follow the other Christian college presidents in denying Boll's premillennialism, made the controversary surrounding Armstrong and his college red-hot by the 1930s.[37]

Primary and secondary sources clarify the differences between Armstrong and Boll on the millennium. In several of his letters he makes general statements that he disagrees with Boll.[38] Armstrong writes in a letter to John T. Lewis

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[36] L. C. Sears, *For Freedom: The Biography of John Nelson Armstrong* (Austin: Sweet Publishing, 1969), 215-216.

[37] Ibid, 282.

that he agrees with James A. Harding's view of the millennium.[39] A note in the J. D. Bales special collection records an instance in which Benson asked Armstrong about whether he affirmed the premillennial position, and Armstrong says he does. Benson says he did not bring the issue up again.[40] Hicks and Valentine refer to Armstrong as a premillennialist.[41] Armstrong's millennial views, then, are best understood in terms of historic premillennialism and not dispensationalism. This is what he inherited from the NBS and from whence Boll departed.

Armstrong differed from Boll on details such as the restoration of Israel to their homeland and the establishment of Christ's reign on earth for one thousand years.[42] In April 1935, Armstrong published a systematic

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[38] J. N Armstrong to E. G. Crouch, May 28, 1938, J. D. Bales Papers, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR. J. N. Armstrong to Judson Woodbridge, September 21, 1938, J. D. Bales Papers, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR. J. N. Armstrong to B. G. Hope, April 29, 1939, J. D. Bales Papers, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR.

[39] J. N. Armstrong to John T. Lewis, n.d. J. D. Bales Papers, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR.

[40] J. D. Bales, "Premillennialism" unpublished memo in J. D. Bales files, August 25, 1989, J. D. Bales Papers, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR.

[41] John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine, *Kingdom Come: Embracing the Spiritual Legacy of David Lipscomb and James Harding* (Abilene: Leafwood, 2006), 167.

[42] J. N. Armstrong, "College Professor Goes on Record Again," in *Firm Foundation*, January 8, 1935: 1.

treatment of his premillennial beliefs. He first outlined several things he did not believe. This list included the two previously mentioned statements and added, the restoration of the Roman empire as a world power, restoration of animal sacrifice, and that Jesus substituted his original plan for the kingdom with the church. To that, he added several things that he did believe, including: that Christ's kingdom was inaugurated at Pentecost following his resurrection, that he was given the name above all names, Christ's kingdom is spiritual – only, Christ's kingdom should reign in the heart of Christians, he has all authority over heaven and earth, and ultimately that authority would prevail.[43] Stevens concludes that Armstrong's article was too little, too late.[44] The fight against Armstrong only grew worse, taken up by Foy E. Wallace, Jr. and later, E. R. Harper. Soon after Benson became president, the issue would culminate in two meetings, one at Little Rock and one at Fort Smith. Benson did not take up the issue in the same way Armstrong did. He first attempted to diffuse the controversy, but when he discovered that he could not, he sidestepped it.

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[43] J. N. Armstrong, "For Good Understanding," *Firm Foundation*, April 30, 1935: 1.

[44] John C. Stevens, *Before Any Were Willing: The Story of George S. Benson* (Searcy: Harding Press, 1991), 119.

Armstrong's refusal to condemn Boll was itself a tenet of the apocalyptic tradition. Harding and Lipscomb were known to bring in speakers with dissenting viewpoints for their students to hear. Asking the faculty member to resign grieved Armstrong because he did not believe such things should be matters of fellowship.[45] L. C.Sears, Armstrong's biographer and son-in-law, considers the theme of freedom – freedom to disagree – central to Armstrong's life and notes how multiple views coexisted among teachers at NBS.[46] In an open letter to E. M. Borden, who chastised Armstrong for his toleration of Boll, Armstrong remarked, "…my sin is that I have been unwilling to denounce, disfellowship, mark and avoid R. H. Boll for his position."[47] In his article to *Firm Foundation* where he laid out his beliefs about the millennial reign, Armstrong said he was not,

> apologizing or defending any individual who is causing division contrary to the doctrine of Christ – no one holds more tenaciously than I that those who cause division contrary to the doctrine of Christ are wrong and should be disciplined. But I am deeply concerned about

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[45] Sears, 185-187, 215-216.

[46] Armstrong, quoted in Sears, "When I entered the Nashville Bible School it was well understood that E. G. Sewell and Dr. Brents differed on the appointment of elders, on the millennium, and on other questions… Each freely discussed his side of the controversial point. That anyone would consider another 'unsound,' 'disloyal,' or unworthy of the most hearty fellowship never entered one's mind." Sears, 185.

[47] Hicks and Valentine, 167.

> freedom in Christ Jesus and undenominational Christianity.[48]

Unity of the church and each individual's freedom to think and speak were far more important to Armstrong than agreement on what he saw as peripheral doctrines.

Armstrong's apocalyptic perspective is also on display in his actions at Cordell Christian College in Oklahoma of which he was president from 1908 to 1919. Armstrong underwent a transformation during his time at NBS. Previously, he held that it was a Christian's duty to be involved in political affairs. Harding and Lipscomb, however, convinced him that God had given the role of vengeance to the government which precluded the Christian's involvement.[49] The United States entered the war in 1917 and issued a draft shortly thereafter. Local Selective Service boards were set up across the country to draft young men into the war. The draft board in Cordell was especially enthusiastic. By July 1919, thirty-eight students and faculty from Cordell, including Armstrong's nephew, joined the war effort.[50] Armstrong advised his male students to enter the military as noncombatants, although some, such as

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[48] J.N, Armstrong, "For Good Understanding," 1.
[49] Sears, 153-154.

[50] Ibid, 156.

faculty member S. A. Bell, argued against even that.[51] In a letter to a contributor of the school, Sears recounts that an article Bell published arguing against Christians joining the war effort stirred up significant local opposition to the school. The locals were so zealous that they painted yellow the store of W. D. Hockaday, the board chairman.[52] The Oklahoma Council of Defense ordered the school closed. The board appealed the decision and Oklahoma Supreme Court Judge, Thomas Owen, was sent to do an independent investigation. While he determined that neither Armstrong nor Cordell had done anything wrong, he counseled Armstrong to close the school over intense local opposition. Armstrong did and moved to Harper College in 1919.[53] After Cordell closed Armstrong said, "This school did not die. Rather it was a martyr for the convictions of the faculty and of its board."[54] During the World War I

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[51] Michael Casey, "Cordell Christian College," *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004): 242. See also, Norman L. Parks, *Cordell's Christian College* (Cordell: Fourth and College Church of Christ, 1994).

[52] Michael W. Casey, "From Religious Outsiders to Insiders: The Rise and Fall of Pacifism in the Churches of Christ," *Journal of Church and State* 44:3 (Summer 2002): 462.

[53] Elizabeth Parsons, *The Greatest Work in the World: Education as a Mission of Early Twentieth-Century Churches of Christ: Letters of Lloyd Cline Sears and Pattie Hathaway Armstrong*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 164-166.

[54] Sears, 158.

years pacifism saw a sharp decline in Churches of Christ as members became part of the establishment in society.[55] Many years later, Benson advocated the entry into World War II in order to defend the American way of life. Ironically, Benson was Hockaday's son-in-law.[56] This shift between Armstrong and Benson, as we shall see, is difficult to overstate.

Armstrong handpicked George S. Benson to be his successor at Harding College. He, too, was an heir of the NBST and studied under Armstrong at Harper College.[57] In early 1935 Armstrong began writing Benson about taking over the presidency. At the time, Benson was founder and president of Canton Bible School in Canton, China.[58] He was initially unsure about accepting but upon convincing by Armstrong and several colleagues in China he realized he would be of more use as president of Harding than in China.[59] Two things are notable in the letters between

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[55] Casey, "Outsiders," 463.

[56] Ibid, 468.

[57] Donald P. Garner, "George S. Benson: Conservative, Anti-Communist, Pro-American Speaker" (PhD diss. Wayne State University, 1963), 62.

[58] Stevens, 108.

[59] George S. Benson, Oral History Project, George S. Benson Files, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR.

Benson and Armstrong. First, Armstrong told Benson that he would not inherit any traditions from him.[60] Benson apparently takes this seriously and departs swiftly and sharply from the NBST. Secondly, Armstrong said, "I believe you can raise money and I can't. This will be the first thing for you to do."[61] Armstrong was correct as Benson raised an average of one million dollars per year for the entirety of his twenty-nine-year presidency.[62] As detailed below, this is largely done through the National Education Program (NEP) which aligned the college with free-trade economics and conservative politics.

Before Benson could begin raising money or advocating for the conservative cause, he had to deal with the lingering issue of Armstrong's premillennialism. Just three months into his presidency in December 1936 he, President Emeritus Armstrong, and Dean Sears attended a preacher's meeting hosted at the Fourth and State Street Church of Christ in Little Rock.[63] The presidents of David Lipscomb

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[60] J.N. Armstrong to George S. Benson, March 3, 1936, George S. Benson Files, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Benson Oral History.

[63] This congregation later became the Sixth and Izard Church of Christ and later the Windsong Church of Christ.

College, Abilene Christian College, and Freed-Hardeman College were there as well to discuss the "Policies, Plans, and Attitudes on the Kingdom Question."[64] The meeting was designed, in part, by Harper to ambush Armstrong on the premillennial issue. One preacher read twelve charges against Armstrong, who did not defend himself. The preacher then lodged similar charges toward Abilene's president against the head of his Bible department. Armstrong asked if he could respond to those questions and said, "And I may ask you, in turn, who gave you. . .the authority to demand the dismissal of any teacher from Abilene Christian College? The faculty of Abilene are responsible to their board of trustees, not to any convention of preachers anywhere!"[65] Armstrong's statement hushed the Little Rock meeting but two and a half years later Harper convened another meeting at Fort Smith. Armstrong was not invited, but Benson, Sears, and the president of the board attended with the belief it was to generate interest for the college in the northwestern part state. Those at the meeting demanded that Armstrong be fired. President Benson declared that Armstrong was not a premillennialist and that he would

[64] Stevens, 121. Sears, 282-284.

[65] Stevens, 121. Sears, 284.

not fire him. The papers and preachers began to turn their attention from Armstrong to Benson, creating suspicion among Churches of Christ. As fundraising among churches became increasingly difficult Benson began to solicit money from businesses instead.[66] The man primarily responsible to introducing Benson to the business world was Clinton Davidson.

Davidson was a former student of Armstrong and Harding at Potter Bible College and a businessman from New York. He became a big contributor to the college and taught Benson a great deal about fundraising. At an earlier meeting Armstrong and Davidson discussed using Davidson's ties to bring some prominent speakers to the campus. Whether Armstrong wanted to do this for fundraising or academic reasons is unknown but the two decided to table the idea until Benson assumed the responsibility of president. The first of these speakers came in April 1937. He was a Princeton professor and a leading authority in economics.[67] Many other high-profile businessmen soon followed him to Harding to give speeches.[68] Soon after Harding's debt was cancelled, Benson paid tribute to Davidson in 1939 for

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[66] Ibid, 124-126.

[67] The name of this speaker is unknown.

[68] Stevens, 128-131.

putting him in contact with "men of means."[69] Benson kept a busy schedule of traveling to raise money for the college. The emphasis on fundraising among business leaders stood in stark contrast to Armstrong's approach, who rarely left the campus and primarily solicited money from amongst Christians. This reflects another aspect of Armstrong's apocalyptic heritage, "special providence," which he inherited from James Harding at the NBS.[70] Harding's high view of divine providence can be readily seen in Armstrong's life and presidency. To him, radical obedience to God's Word and trust in his care was central. Writing of contemporary preachers' messages, he said, "Each man is left, it seems from this teaching, to work out his own success…. This is not the God of the Bible."[71] But Benson aggressively raised money and his efforts culminated in what would eventually become the National Education Program, as seen in Chapter Five.[72]

When the United States entered World War I, Armstrong advocated that Cordell's students enter the service as conscientious objectors. On the eve of World War II,

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[69] Ibid, 132.

[70] Sears, 176.

[71] Ibid, 176-177.

[72] Hereafter, NEP.

however, Benson depicted the war as a "crusade to preserve the American political and economic systems."[73] Benson's advocacy for war was decidedly different than Armstrong's stance against it. While Armstrong was *theologically* opposed to war, Benson saw it as a fight to defeat atheistic communist powers and defend American governmental and economic systems. Benson routinely referred to the need to defeat the Axis powers to "preserve representative constitutional government in America after the war is over."[74] He urged all Americans to make deep sacrifices for the sake of the war effort.[75] He appropriates The Book of Hebrews, stating, "Victory over the Axis powers and the preservation of that for which the nation fights is the goal before America. The whole world constitutes the 'host of witnesses' and the sacrifices we are called upon to make constitute the cross."[76]

Benson's experiences with communism, the need to raise money for Harding College, and the influence of Clinton

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[73] Hicks, 49.

[74] George S. Benson, "Our Part in this Present Emergency," April 9, 1942, George S. Benson Files, Brackett Library, Harding University, 1.

[75] Ibid, 2.

[76] George S. Benson, "Statement of Dr. George S. Benson, President Harding College, Searcy, Ark. Given Before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor." April 14, 1942, George S. Benson Files, Harding University, Searcy, AR.

Davidson created the perfect storm for the death of the apocalyptic worldview at Harding College even though Armstrong and Benson were both heirs of the NBST. On the premillennial issue Armstrong refused to line up with those who condemned Boll, even though he disagreed with his dispensationalism. Benson similarly refused to condemn Armstrong for the attacks against him but side-stepped the issue himself. Instead of continuing to fight it, he ceased soliciting money from churches and went to big businesses. On the Christian's duty to government, Armstrong advised his students not to fight in war. Conversely, Benson preached that America's entrance into World War II was about defending American political and economic systems. Lastly, whereas Armstrong largely remained on the campus teaching his classes and trusting that God would keep the school afloat, Benson kept a busy schedule of meetings to raise money for it. By the end of Benson's tenure as president in 1965, hardly a trace of the old NBST can be found at Harding.

Chapter III

A Biographical Sketch of J. D. Bales

Bales's loss of the apocalyptic perspective parallels many of his life experiences. This chapter discusses biographical facts of his life with added emphasis on a few key events to give essential context for later chapters which discuss his theology. The only details given are those which situate him within a historical, cultural, and theological context.

A definitive biography has yet to be written about Bales and his legacy is contested. His own unfinished autobiographies are both aptly titled, "In Controversy Oft," and "Odyssey of an Anti-Communist."[1] Some claimed that his name would be prominent in subsequent histories of Churches of Christ, but he is at best only briefly mentioned.[2] The extent of his influence was questioned even during his life. Don Haymes gave this colorful assessment,

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[1] Both of these partial manuscripts can be found in the James David Bales Papers (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

[2] Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1996), 210, 214, 297-98, 339. His name does not appear in D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013) or Leroy Garret, *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (Joplin: College Press, 1981).For predictions of Bales's significant and lasting influence see Dewey Brown, "Powerful Voice Against the Reds," *Arkansas Democrat*, September 18, 1960. Tom Eddins, "A Tribute to J. D. Bales: 1915-1995," *The*

> In the beginning, 30 or more years ago, he was Young Lochinvar riding out of the West, a newly-minted Doctor of Philosophy from Berkeley, boldly slaying the dragons of Error and rescuing the damsels of Truth. If today he seems more like Don Quixote, loping along on a flea-bitten nag, helmet slightly askew, armed with a pen rather than a lance, befuddled by the alchemy of the printed word-it is perhaps only our perceptions which changed.[3]

But Bales stood as one of the most significant and prolific forces against modern liberal scholarship, communism, and atheism in twentieth century Churches of Christ.

Early Life and Education (1915-1944)

Bales was born in November 5, 1915 in Tacoma, Washington as the fifth of eight children. His father studied under James A. Harding at Potter Bible College in Bowling Green, Kentucky.[4] He was orphaned at the age of eleven when his parents' car collided with a train on their way to Bible study. Bales noted that the loneliest day of his life was when he and his siblings were divided up to live with various family members and children's homes.[5] He

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Christian Servant: Harding University College of Bible and Religion 1:1 (Fall 1995).

[3] Donas Jackson Haymes III, "A Nice Guy," *Integrity* 9 (August 8, 1977): 46.

[4] James D. Bales, "The Christian's Relation to Civil Government," in *Abilene Christian College Bible Lectures* (Abilene: Abilene Christian College Students Exchange, 1962). 443.

[5] Travis Cox, "Tragedy Struck the Bales Family Early On," *Searcy Daily Citizen*, February 1996.

went to live with his grandparents in Georgia. There he attended Fitzgerald High School (1929-1930), Georgia Military Academy (1930-1931), and graduated from Georgia Tech High School (1931-1933). He moved from Georgia to Searcy, Arkansas to attend Harding College, graduating in 1937 with undergraduate degrees in History and English.[6] Two of his research interests, the kingdom of God and communism, emerged during graduate study. He graduated from George Peabody College in 1938 with a Master of Arts degree in English. His thesis was entitled, "The Kingdom of God, or World State, in the Writings of H. G. Wells."[7] Peabody professor Michael John Demiashkevich, a Russian refuge, began his interest in communism.

Also, in 1938 Bales helped launch a new journal called *20th Century Christian* from the basement of the Hillsboro Church of Christ, with three other graduate students. All four were heirs of the apocalyptic worldview. Three of them, including Bales, studied under Armstrong at Harding College. Norvel Young, the fourth cofounder of the journal, was a graduate of David Lipscomb College. Their goal was to

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[6] Mary Ethel Gale, email to Carrol Osburn, July 12, 2002, copy in possession of author. Mary Ethel is the daughter of J. D. Bales.

[7] James D. Bales, "'H. G. Wells: Kingdom of Heaven' (Bales's Master Thesis) [Disassembled Notebook]," James David Bales Papers (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

appeal to a younger generation of Christians by offering an alternative to the fighting style of journals like Foy Esco Wallace's *Gospel Guardian* and *Bible Banner*.[8] These students shared a deep concern that the current climate in Churches of Christ, characterized by cold and harsh doctrinal debates, failed to connect with the current generation. The importance (and genius) of this journal was that it was primarily devotional and escaped the notice of polemicists like Wallace. Their unique contribution to SCM thought was the blending of their apocalyptic heritage with practical spiritual living. In so doing, they shed the pessimism of apocalyptic worldview and fundamentally helped change eschatological thought in Churches of Christ. From here, Bales's great contribution to Churches of Christ would be a *via media* between Wallace's brash amillennialism and Boll's pessimistic premillennialism. The eschatological vision that began developing in Bales in the *20th Century Christian* was an optimistic amillennialism that maintained a focus on restorationism. The tagline to this new journal proclaimed its goal, "New Testament Christianity in the Present Age."[9]

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[8] Hughes, 160. Wallace established the *Gospel Guardian* to fight premillennialism. One significant indicator of the impending death of the apocalyptic worldview is that Wallace became editor of the *Gospel Advocate* in 1930-1934.

[9] "Editorial," *20th Century Christian* 1:1 (Oct 1938).

On its face, this new way was not anti-apocalyptic, but it provided a means by which to carry on the apocalyptic worldview's focus on kingdom living without continuing the conflation with premillennialism. After his return to Harding, however, Bales would also fall victim to the conflation of premillennialism and apocalypticism and attack both.

After Peabody, he moved to Toronto, Canada with the hope of traveling to South Africa from there. He studied briefly at the University of Toronto (1939-1940) and preached for the Fern Avenue Church of Christ.[10] When war broke out between Germany and Great Britain Bales knew he needed to address the war question. For the first time in Bales's life the question was not theoretical; he said, "I screwed up my courage to the sticking place and preached on it anyhow."[11] While in Canada he met and married Mary Smart, the daughter of the church's song leader. The couple would have six children.

They moved to California in 1940 so Bales could pursue a PhD at the University of California at Berkeley. His dissertation was entitled "History of Pragmatism in

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[10] James D. Bales, "J. D. Bales," *GA* (October 9, 1941): 972.

[11] James D. Bales, "The War Question," James David Bales, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

American Educational Philosophy."[12] While in California Bales preached for the Eighth Avenue Church of Christ in San Francisco and the Whittle Avenue Church of Christ in Oakland.[13]

Bales's sister and brother-in-law were in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and helped those wounded during the attack. Still, Bales preached against the Christian's right to be involved in war. Soon his conscience would bother him, but not because he was about to give up his conviction. Preachers were not subject to the draft and Bales decided that it was not right for him to preach against something that had no possibility of affecting him. He told the local draft board to remove his protected status. They did and draft proceedings soon began. Bales was summoned before the draft board where he continued to affirm the conscientious objector position. The board decided not to draft him.[14]

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[12] University of California, *Register, 1945-1946 with Announcements for 1946-1947 in Two Volumes*. Vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947).

[13] Travis Cox, "Bales Started Wrestling Team at Harding," *Searcy Daily Citizen*, February 26, 1996. James D. Bales, *Forty-Two Years on the Firing Line* (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1977) 11. Hereafter, *Firing Line*.

[14] "The War Question," 2.

Bales's first religious debate was with a Seventh-day Adventist in 1944 over the Sabbath question.[15] As an undergraduate at Harding, Bales won the 1936 Arkansas State Championship in debate under the tutelage of Dean L. C. Sears. He held dozens more over his career primarily about atheism, evolution, communism, various denominations, and world religions.[16] While he was at Peabody, his uncle came for a visit and shared that he had joined the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints of Jesus Christ. This encouraged Bales's interest in the cults, and he began to research them ferociously. When he moved to Ontario, he looked up Bishop R. C. Evans, a former executive in the Reorganized LDS Church. Though Evans had died, Bales bought his library from his widow.[17] His highest profile debates were those against Woolsey Teller (four times) and Carl Sagan.[18] Madalyn Murray O'Hair also agreed to debate Bales, although plans never materialized.[19]

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[15] *Firing Line*, 11.

[16] He details several of these debates in *Forty-Two Years on the Firing Line*. See also, Paul D. Haynie, "James David Bales (1915-1995," Encyclopedia of Arkansas, last updated June 14, 2017, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/james-david-bales-4724.

[17] *Firing Line*, 24.

[18] Haynie. *Firing Line*, 13, 49.

[19] *Firing Line*, 82

Career at Harding (1944-1988)

He returned to Searcy to preach part-time at the College Church of Christ and teach at Harding in 1944.[20] Benson requested his return due to Armstrong's sudden passing. Bales completed his PhD in 1946. His first fifteen years at Harding were marked by a transition away from the apocalyptic perspective. By 1947, Bales had already published three works on the pacifist perspective. He first shed his view on governmental noninvolvement, which he had inherited from David Lipscomb. Although he gained an interest in communism while studying at Peabody College, he did not initially pursue it because he held to "David Lipscomb's position on civil government."[21] Benson had already begun his economic and political crusade. Bales said, "I was leery of Dr. Benson [sic] free enterprise and anti-communism crusades because I thought it was dabbling in politics."[22] He initially maintained his pacifism even while he reversed his view on the Christian's relation to civil government,

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[20] George S. Benson to James D. Bales, September 6, 1944, L. M. Graves Memorial Library, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN.

[21] James D. Bales, "Michael John Demiashkevich (Nov. 8, 1891-August 26, 1938)" James David Bales, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville. Hereafter, "Demiashkevich."

[22] "Demiashkevich."

> Over a period of time I realized, as I had not realized before, that this was primary [sic] a spiritual and not a political battle, and there were spiritual weapons which I could use in this conflict without having to resort to physical weapons. Gradually I abandoned the Lipscomb position.[23]

Bales was comfortable enough with his new stance to spend part of 1958 lecturing on communism in the Far East, Southeastern Asia, and Europe.[24] At the Abilene Christian College Lectures in 1962, Bales gave an overview of his new position of civil government, including a repudiation of pacifism. Christians must remain subject to the state; therefore, if the state required one to vote he would have to do so. Bales reasoned that if one would have to vote if required by law, it could not be wrong to vote when permitted by law. Further, he said voting was merely a means of speaking one's voice in a democratic system. If voting was wrong, then any kind of speaking about the government or the political process with an aim toward influencing another would be equally wrong. Bales maintained that one could participate in the political process without rendering services to the state which violated the Christian's conscience. For one, the state

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[23] "Demiashkevich."

[24] *Firing line*, 32.

made no correlation between voting and participation in the military.[25] By 1962, he had fully moved away from the pacifist position.[26] Though he said he would rather be a preacher than a policeman, he could participate in the vengeance function of government with a clear conscience.[27] He further justified "wars of aggression against dictatorships. . .in order to provide an environment" to preach the gospel.[28] But Bales maintained that though individual Christians may participate in the vengeance function of government, the church and state must remain separated. Just seven months before his death, likely his final word on the subject, Bales stated, "let not the church pick up the sword of vengeance. Christ called us to a spiritual, not carnal, war."[29]

Two events, nearly one decade apart, help illustrate Bales's role at Harding. Robert Meyers departed the college in 1960 after his contract was not renewed. Meyers was an

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[25] "The Christian's Relation to Civil Government," 447-449.

[26] *Firing Line*, 21.

[27] "The War Question," 9.

[28] "War," James David Bales, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

[29] "A Prisoner of War?" January 6, 1995, James David Bales, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

English professor with a PhD from Washington University in St. Louis. While there he studied textual criticism and began applying it to the Bible. His advocacy of modern liberal scholarship, particularly the documentary hypothesis, landed him under the criticism of Bales. Meyers held that the Bible contained errors and contradictions.[30] He denied the historicity of certain OT people and events and that the Bible was the "final standard."[31] Bales brought some of Meyers' beliefs to the attention of Benson who decided not to renew his contract.

Bales argument was essentially that critical theory was a slippery slope. He said, "Although first generation modernists may cling to the morality of the Bible, the generation reared on modernism as a general rule goes on to repudiate the morality of the Bible."[32] In 1969, Meyers responded to Bales's actions,

> To be honest, I am so glad to be away from the religious and political philosophy of Harding (upon which I look with utter horror), that I often bless the part you had in my leaving. I think your motives at the time of my heresy trial were absolutely pure and consistent with the view of Christianity which you hold.[33]

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[30] See Robert Meyers, "Between Two Worlds," in *Voices of Concern: Critical Studies in Church of Christism*, ed. Robert Meyers (St. Louis: Mission Messenger,1966), 247-263.

[31] *Firing Line*, 93-94.

[32] *Firing Line*, 120.

A similar situation appeared in the Fall of 1968 when James Atteberry, another English professor, gave a speech about academic freedom at a faculty retreat. Here he argued that although truth is absolute, man's ability to grasp it is not.[34] Certainty of one's discovery of absolute truth must be held tentatively. Bales disagreed with Atteberry that knowledge of the absolute was ever receding. Bales's point is easy to understand if he referred only to the broad contours of the Christian faith. But Bales's interpretation was much more specific:

> If by tentative, he means through study, we all have to make some changes because we grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ…. But, if he means (and I think he does) the plan of salvation, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, acapella music in corporate worship, and autonomous government of the New Testament congregation (i.e. some of the identifying marks of undenominational), there is no way under God's heaven one can be a church leader and maintain these matters are subject to change.[35]

In March 1969, Atteberry and some of his sympathizers met with Harding president Clifton Ganus to discuss the issue of academic freedom at Harding College.[36] Following

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[33] *Firing Line*, 91.

[34] Jimmy Allen, *Fire in My Bones: (Jeremiah 20:9)* (Searcy, Ark: The author, 2004), 142.

[35] Allen, 142-143.

[36] Clifton L. Ganus, Jr. was the third president of Harding College succeeding Benson in 1965.

this meeting some of Atteberry's opponents asked to meet with Ganus to express their own concerns about Atteberry's views. When the president of the board heard about these meetings, he called a meeting of the board. Bales and Jimmy Allen both gave reviews of Atteberry's "Freedom of Scholarship" paper presented at the faculty meeting the previous Fall. The board agreed to terminate Atteberry at the end of the year. As such, Atteberry had a right to plead his own case before the board and a meeting was scheduled for May. Instead, Atteberry resigned and went to work for Pepperdine and the meeting never occurred.[37] Other faculty members resigned in sympathy with Atteberry.[38]

In both cases Bales feared the influence that modernism would have on an institution like Harding. He believed the eventual result of influences like Meyers and Atteberry would be secularization of the college. To show this he gave J. J. Altizer and Bishop John A. T. Robinson as examples of the logical conclusion of Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich. To Bales, teachers with these views were dishonest for agreeing to teach at Harding and dangerous to

[37]Allen, 148-150.

[38] One example is Joel Anderson, who was on leave pursuing his PhD at University of Michigan and went to work for University of Arkansas at Little Rock instead of returning to Harding. Interview with author, September 24, 2019.

the institution. He saw himself as a protector of the institution stating,

> Having gone to school under those who established Harding, and having had numerous conversations with individuals who helped shape the objectives of the school, and having associated over the years with a number of teachers who had the same experience, I am convinced that my position is basically that of the founders of the institution.[39]

He opposed these teachers because their ideas, in his mind, questioned the authority of the Bible and the institution. Bales's eschatological vision of the Christian's role in expanding the borders of the kingdom required authority, something by which to measure people, institutions, and ideas which were not yet subject to Christ's reign.[40] When questioned about his role in these issues and similar issues which arose at Harding, Bales made himself clear, "We must give militant support to the Bible, and to the principles of Harding College."[41]

Benson and Bales shared an increasingly close bond, especially over their distaste of communism. Though Bales did not originally agree with Benson's promotion of free-enterprise economics and anti-communism through his National Education Program, he soon became the

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[39] *Firing Line*, 135.

[40] Ibid, 160.

[41] Ibid, 155.

organization's lead researcher and writer. Bales wrote countless articles for religious and political periodicals and dozens of books. His published works, though prolific, were met with limited success. Bales himself acknowledged this and attributed it to writing on subjects of limited interest though there were a few exceptions. His 1962 work, *Communism: Its Faith and Fallacies* won the Christian Family Book Club's Century Book Award.[42] Perhaps his most notorious book was *The Martin Luther King Story* published by Billy James Hargis' Christian Crusade in which he accused Martin Luther King, Jr. of associating with communists, adopting subversive methods, and being a threat to the social order of the United States.[43] While his writings largely consist of dry, logical deductions which are often combative in tone and sometimes include biting sarcasm, colleagues, students, and family described him as witty, sharp, personable, and warm.[44] In 1977, Haymes claimed that Bales had been involved

[42] "James D. Bales," *Gospel Advocate* 65 (September 1, 1995): 46.

[43] See Chapter Six for more on Billy James Hargis. James D. Bales, *The Martin Luther King Story* (Tulsa: Christian Crusade Publications, 1967).

[44] "James D. Bales," *Christian Chronicle* 52 (October 1, 1995) 1. Joel Anderson, interview with author, September 24, 2019. Carisse Berryhill, email to author, April 16, 2019.

with nearly every controversy in Churches of Christ for over three decades.[45]

Bales won Harding's Distinguished Alumnus award in 1976.[46] His 1979 work on divorce and remarriage entitled *Not Under Bondage*, marked one of the few times Bales took the more progressive stance on a church issue.[47] With this book, he entered his most heated controversy yet. It resulted in at least two book length rebuttals by his opponents.[48] Then Bales responded with three more books on the subject and one written debate.[49]

With a few exceptions, his publishing career breaks down by decade. In the 1940s Bales primarily focused on defending the pacifist position. Following World War II, he wrote two books on the kingdom of God in the 1950s. The 1960s were primarily dominated by an interest in communism,

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[45] Haymes, 47.

[46] "Bales Receives Distinguished Alumnus," *Christian Chronicle* 33 (November 16, 1976) 8.

[47] James D. Bales, *Not Under Bondage* (Searcy, AR: The author, 1979).

[48] Jerry Moffitt, *Bales's Position Explained and Denied* (Austin: The author, 1982). Thomas B. Warren, *Keeping the Lock in Wedlock: A Critical Analysis of the Doctrine of Dr. James D. Bales on Divorce and Remarriage* (Jonesboro, AR, 1980).

[49] James D. Bales, *Shall We Splinter?* (Searcy, AR: The author, 1980). James D. Bales, *Divorce Dilemma Dissolved?* (Searcy, AR: The author, 1980). James D. Bales, *The Scope of the Covenants with a Review of Keeping the Lock in Wedlock* (Searcy, AR: The author, 1982). James D. Bales, *Bales-Deaver Debate on Aliens and the Covenant* (Searcy, AR: The author, 1988).

evolution, and atheism, all of which were related for Bales. By the middle of the decade he began to turn his attention to modernism and relativism with the fight over academic freedom at Harding. He ended his career writing about the marriage and divorce issue in the 1970s and 1980s.

Bales retired in 1988 but remained the school's "elder statesmen" in the fight against communism and the spread of liberal Christianity.[50] He died on August 16th, 1995 and is buried in Searcy, Arkansas.[51]

[50] "Bales", *Christian Chronicle.*

[51] "Tragedy."

Chapter IV

Bales on the Kingdom of God

Bales's view of how the church should operate in the world stems from his eschatological vision. This chapter analyzes Bales's view of the kingdom of God by comparing it to that of R. H. Boll and Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Wallace lodged a fierce attack on Boll in the 1930s and 1940s. Without a doubt, these were the two major players in the premillennial controversy. Boll was the chief proponent of dispensational premillennialism, and Wallace was his primary opponent. Wallace's efforts to extinguish premillennialism were so remarkably successful that by 1949, the only holdouts were centered around Boll's points of influence in New Orleans, Louisiana and Louisville, Kentucky.[1] Still, the issue lingered on, not as a question of controversy, but as a distinctive of Churches of Christ. The subject remained on the docket of lectureships and in the pages of the fellowship's journals for years afterward.[2] Wallace and Boll were both considerably older than Bales,[3]

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[1] Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2008), 161.

[2] A search of "premillennialism" in the Restoration Serials Index yields 62 results for the years 1949-1995. These years correspond to the year the Bible Banner ceased publication and Bales's retirement.

and the war over premillennialism was waning by the time Bales came to teach at Harding.[4] The battle had been waged during his formative years and Bales gave considerable time to the issue.[5] His generation would be the last to do so. "By 1945 Churches of Christ had effectively removed the apocalyptic worldview from the mainstream of the movement."[6] This was largely a result of the fight against premillennialism.

The nature of God's present kingdom rule is primarily at issue here and not premillennialism. But millennialism is inseparably connected to the issue as Bales, Boll, and Wallace understood it. I will first make some introductory comments about Bales's eschatology. Next, I will highlight the key differences between Bales and Boll, then observe some similarities and differences between Bales and Wallace. Some connections are made with Bales and the key figures discussed in Chapter Two.

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[3] Wallace and Boll were 20- and 40-years Bales's senior, respectively.

[4] Although, as an institution, Harding was late to denounce premillennialism because of Armstrong's earlier refusal to condemn Boll.

[5] Bales devoted at least three books, numerous articles, and many lectureship talks to the premillennial question.

[6] *The Stone-Campbell Movement: Global History*, eds. D. Newell Williams, Douglas Foster, and Paul Blowers (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 153. Hereafter, *Global History*.

Bales's Eschatology

How Bales appropriated parts of what John Mark Hicks calls the Texas and Tennessee Traditions is also notable in this story.[7]

> Theologically, the Tennessee stream regarded the church as a manifestation of the Kingdom, but not as identical with it as the Texas tradition insisted. Tennessee's eschatology yearned for a renewed earth whereas Texas expected the annihilation of the earth along with a platonic spiritual existence in heaven…. Tennessee affirmed an exclusive allegiance to the Kingdom of God, while Texas affirmed a dual – though tiered – allegiance to the church and nation.[8]

Though Bales's theology defies the neat categories offered by Hicks, it is helpful to see Bales's transition as a move from the Tennessee Tradition to the Texas Tradition. Bales held to classical amillennialism, though the term does not appear in his writings. He had earlier espoused the apocalyptic worldview, but there is no evidence he ever subscribed to premillennialism. While he normally advocated for a plain or literal reading of Scripture, Bales held that it was appropriate to view the thousand-year reign of

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[7] John Mark Hicks, "The Struggle for the Soul of Churches of Christ: Hoosiers, Volunteers, and Longhorns," in *And the Word Became Flesh: Studies in History, Communication, and Scripture in Memory of Michael W. Casey*, ed. Thomas Olbricht and David Fleer (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 54-71.

[8] *Global History*, 152. The Tennessee and apocalyptic traditions refer to the same beliefs.

Revelation 20 as symbolic. His primary concern when arguing against the premillennial position was the affect it had on one's view of the church. Bales had a high view of the church as God's kingdom. The premillennial position relegated the church to an afterthought. He refuted the position primarily through logical deduction of the New Testament and prophetic fulfillment of the Old Testament. Bales, like Lipscomb, equated the church and the kingdom and held that God had moved on from Israel following their rejection of Christ as the Messiah. Lipscomb had earlier said,

> God then took the Jewish national government out of the way, and superseded it with the kingdom of heaven - the Church of God, which was fitted for the service of individuals - few or all - in all nations, and aspires to universal and eternal dominion on earth. It is to embrace all people, all nations, kindreds and tribes, and to mingle and mold them into one universal brotherhood, to break in pieces and destroy all earthly kingdoms and dominions and fill the whole earth and stand forever. The mission of this Church is to rescue and redeem the earth from the rule and dominion of the human kingdoms, from the rebellion against God, and to reinstate the authority and rule of God on earth through his own kingdom.[9]

Bales held this view as well, noting,

> The Kingdom which was taken away from the Jews was given to the nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. But the kingdom which was taken away was the old

[9] David Lipscomb, *Civil Government: Its Origin, Mission, and Destiny, and the Christian's Relation to it* (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1913), 12.

> commonwealth of literal Israel, and the kingdom which was given is a spiritual kingdom.[10]

Bales gave two reasons for studying the nature of God's kingdom: 1) so that one knows how to enter and work in it, and 2) because the premillennial question gives an unacceptable answer regarding its establishment.[11] Though there is no evidence Bales was ever premillennial, he held that Christians should live as if Christ reigns on his throne and through the church. Because of this, he eventually came to believe that the church should transform all parts of society. He said, "The church is universal in its scope or operation. It is not to wait, before it penetrates a society…"[12] He dedicated his first book to J. N. Armstrong for the influence he had on him at Harding College. In this work, Bales defended the pacifist position.

> Although we are not in a perfect society these are the principles of the perfect society and in order for that society to begin to be formed in us and to make its presence increasingly known in the world, Christians must get the spirit of that perfect society in them. The better world, this side of heaven, will not come until men undergo that moral and spiritual

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[10] James D. Bales, "The New Testament Church in Prophecy," *Harding College Lectures* (1950): 135-136.

[11] James D. Bales, *The Kingdom: Prophesied and Established* (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1957), preface.

[12] James D. Bales, "Reactionaries?" James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library Fayetteville.

> change which Christ works in a man. As Ballou state [sic], the 'principles, dispositions and moral obligations of men' in a so-called millennium would not be 'essentially different from what the New Testament requires them to be now' (175). If heaven were now brought to earth the 'gospel just as it stands, would be sufficient to guide and govern men (177). We cannot wait until a perfect society comes, we must now give striking evidence that we are now 'partakers of the divine nature,' sons of God, who are endeavoring to be a prepared people who may finally enter heaven, that prepared place for a prepared people. These teachings not merely constitute the ideal but they are also the 'method of attaining that ideal' (Macgregor, 46)[13]

Bales's major shift away from the apocalyptic tradition is readily seen in the contrast of this statement with Lipscomb's before it. Bales always advocated for conducting oneself in submission to Christ's rule. The difference we see is in *how* a Christian should react to a world which did not submit to Christ's rulership. His early life is dominated by positions which he believed reflected submission to Christ's present kingdom rule. Neither the church institutionally, nor individual Christians should take positions on political matters. The world may come to faith in Christ because the church takes these positions, but the church should not be involved in penetrating

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[13] James D. Bales, *Christ's Teaching on War* (Berkeley: J. D. Bales, c.1943), 16-17. Exact date of publication is unknown, context suggests 1943 as the latest possible date. He moved to Berkeley, CA in approximately 1938 to pursue a doctorate and was hired by Harding College in 1944. The latest source cited in the book is 1943.

societal institutions to produce change. The church's primary concern should be on holy living and living under the laws of the heavenly kingdom. This would include trust that God would provide the means for the expansion of the gospel. The church's dominion was over spiritual matters while the political establishment was ordained by God to rule physically. Beginning in the 1950s, however, Bales broadened his view of how the individual Christians should engage the world to include things like combating atheistic communism. Notably, his view of the institutional church's role in the world remained confined to spiritual matters throughout Bales's life.

R. H. Boll

R. H. Boll was a Catholic German immigrant who was influenced by Harding and Lipscomb at the Nashville Bible School, 1895-1900. There he adopted the apocalyptic perspective and the historic premillennial views of James A. Harding. Later, in conversation with fundamentalist thought, his eschatology developed into dispensational premillennialism. Bales interacted with Boll's works significantly as he defended his own amillennialism.

Wallace attacked Boll's dispensationalism and conflated it with Lipscomb's apocalyptic separatism to

fight it. Lipscomb was regarded as untouchable, so Wallace's tactics were savvy,[14] but Bales was an heir of the Lipscomb tradition and maintained a certain respect for Lipscomb throughout his life. Both men regarded premillennialism as a slight on the church, but Bales did not explicitly connect premillennialism and the doctrines of the apocalyptic worldview. Boll promoted a "postponement theory" of the millennium in which he argued that Christ came to set up his kingdom among the Jews.[15] When the Jews rejected his rule, he set up the church to fill in the gap between Christ's coming and the millennial reign. That the church was a mere substitute for Christ's rule, did not sit well with Bales because, as he saw it, it released the Christian from working in the present world.[16] Boll's postponement theory was no small problem for Bales and it

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[14] To this point I have made no comment regarding the intentionality of the conflation of the apocalyptic worldview with premillennialism, however, it is likely that Wallace intentionally conflated them as a tactic. He attached a review critical of Lipscomb's *Civil Government* to his own book on the subject. See Foy E. Wallace, *The Christian and the Government with a Review of the Lipscomb Theory of Civil Government by O. C. Lambert* (Nashville: F. E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, 1968).

[15] Kevin James Gilbert, "The Stone-Campbell Millennium: A Historical Theological Perspective," *Restoration Quarterly* 43:1 (2001): 43-44.

[16] Bales reflects Wallace's view on this point, see Charles M. Neal and Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *Neal-Wallace Discussion on the Thousand Years Reign of Christ* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1933), 346-349 and Foy E Wallace, Jr., *The Book of Revelation: Consisting of a Commentary on the Apocalypse of the New Testament* (Nashville, Foy E. Wallace Publications, 1966) 409.

bled into Bales's other works. For instance, in a book against communism Bales said,

> Every plan for removing evils by the creation of a new society leaves the evils which exist in the present untouched. To postpone living until the future has arrived…is to pass on to the future responsibilities which lie in the present.[17]

But the kingdom is now, and Christians have a responsibility now, "One way of stating the main theme of the Bible is to say that it deals with Christ and his kingdom. Of course, redemption is the central theme, but redemption is involved in the work of Christ and his rule."[18] Christ's rule through the church remained an important theme to him before and throughout his relationship with Benson:

> The author believes that the kingdom which was at hand was the kingdom of God's dear Son in which Christ now reigns (Col. 1:13), and that it was established on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:34-36). Although the term church and the term kingdom may emphasize somewhat different aspects of Christ's present rule, they both deal with the same basic reality and relationship.[19]

Several aspects of the kingdom were critical to Bales's thinking. First, the kingdom was prophesied, and

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[17] James D. Bales, *Communism and the Reality of Moral Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1969), 93.

[18] Bales, *Kingdom*, 9.

[19] Ibid.

prophecy must be fulfilled unconditionally. Second, Christ's reign is invisible until he returns. Third, the law of Moses must be done away with before Christ's rule could begin. Fourth, and perhaps most important to Bales's application of the kingdom reign, it would not *begin* with the destruction of Christ's enemies. Fifth, the reign would continue until Christ's enemies are made his footstool.[20] This last point is Bales's justification for combating so many issues within and outside the church. The present-day church should work toward the destruction of Christ's enemies.

Bales also believed Boll's view undermined OT prophecy with wide-reaching implications. Bales argued, "The acceptance of [the premillennial view of the kingdom] has a tremendous impact on one's attitude toward the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah's reign, the personal ministry of Christ, the church, and toward the second coming of Christ."[21] The Book of Daniel figured prominently into Bales's argument. In the biblical account, King

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[20] James D. Bales, *Finality of the Faith* (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, c.1972), 79-80. Hereafter, *Finality*. Bales' kingdom theology predates his abandonment of the apocalyptic worldview, perhaps making it easier for him to justify his changed mind theologically.

[21] James D. Bales, *Prophecy and Premillennialism: The Cross before the Crown* (Searcy, AR: Bales's Book Club, 1972), 5. Hereafter, *Prophecy*.

Nebuchadnezzar has a dream which Daniel is asked to reveal and interpret for him. The dream was of an image made of various materials. The image had a head made of gold, chest and arms of silver, torso and thighs formed from bronze, and feet of iron and clay. A stone strikes and destroys the image in the king's dream, and Daniel interprets the action to be predictive of four successive kingdoms that will arise and be destroyed. How to interpret this prophecy was a major difference between Bales and Boll.

The crux of each one's argument lies in how they interpreted Daniel 2:44, "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever." Both agreed on the designations assigned to each part of the image. The head of gold represented Babylon, the chest and arms corresponded with the Medo-Persian Empire, the torso and thighs symbolized the Greek Empire, Rome was prophesied in the legs and feet. From here the two differed. Bales believed that Dan 2:44 referred to Pentecost when God established the church as his kingdom. He maintained that, "The church and the kingdom have the same ruler, the same beginning place, the same beginning date, law, keys, same

terms of admission, same members, memorial, and the same glory."[22]

Boll's view was more complex. Boll's held that the ten toes of the image represented a Roman confederacy that did not materialize in the first century. Instead, sometime near Christ's return, the Roman Empire would be revived, and these ten little kingdoms would be subservient to a resurrected Roman state.[23] Bales opposed Boll's interpretation because of its implications for the church,

> According to Boll's interpretation, Daniel not only failed to mention the great gap – which existed for a longer time than the three kingdoms, and the first century phase of the Roman Empire, combined – between the feet and the toes, but he also failed to mention the New Testament church which was established in the first century. And yet, this church is God's great kingdom of grace. This shows that its importance, in connection with God's work for man cannot be overestimated. Furthermore, this kingdom has already existed around two thousand years, which is much longer, in point of time, than the "millennial kingdom" is supposed to exist. So both with reference to its nature and duration, no kingdom of heaven could be more important than the one in which we are now. However, if Boll's interpretation is correct, Daniel skipped over the kingdom of God's dear son; it is not even mentioned or hinted at in the image and the interpretation of the image.[24]

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[22] Bales, *Kingdom*, 11.

[23] Bales, *Kingdom*, 29. R. H. Boll, *The Kingdom of God: A Survey-Study of the Bible's Principle Theme* (Louisville: The Word and Work, n.d.), 32. Hereafter, *Kingdom*. Boll took the symbolism of Dan 2, the ten horns of the fourth beast in Dan 7, and Rev 17:12-13 to refer to the same Roman confederacy. R. H. Boll, The Millennium (Louisville, The Word and Work, n.d.).

[24] Bales, *Kingdom*, 35. For Boll's view see H. Leo Boles and R. H. Boll, *Unfulfilled Prophecy: A Discussion on Prophetic Themes* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1954).

In opposing premillennialism, Bales overstated and mischaracterized Boll's view of Christ's present reign. Boll agreed with Bales that those who are in Christ's church are in his kingdom and under his rule.[25] Both also agreed that the kingdom is yet to come in its fullness. Still, Boll maintained, "the Kingdom of God, in the phase of it which is viewed in Daniel, has not yet come."[26] Rome did not fall following the events of Pentecost, but continued to expand.

Boll also held that while Jesus ascended to the heavenly throne, he had not yet taken the political throne of David.[27] In Acts 2, Peter affirms that Jesus is the heir of the Davidic throne, but he did not say that Christ assumed the throne immediately after his resurrection. For Boll, his assumption to the throne, as the sovereign over Israel, is still in the future. The Davidic throne and the heavenly are different thrones.[28] The implication is that Israel would have to be restored before Christ could assume David's throne. Bales's argument against Boll's distinction

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[25] Boll, *Kingdom*, 16.

[26] Boll, *Kingdom*, 33.

[27] Boll, *Kingdom*, 111-115.

[28] Ibid.

of the heavenly and Davidic throne shows his apocalyptic heritage. Because Boll differentiated between the two thrones, Bales argued that there was a difference in the two kingdoms Boll had in view. One was a spiritual kingdom, now in force, and the other was a political kingdom, to be enforced at Christ's return and assumption of the throne of David. Because of this, different rules could apply to each kingdom that would make them incongruent with one another. Bales characterized Boll's position, "The present kingdom does not enforce with carnal might… but the millennial kingdom will. So the two differ in their nature."[29] Bales believed the two kingdoms had the same nature and were in place simultaneously. God's kingdom uses spiritual and not carnal weapons, although an individual Christian may choose to engage the political process to make way for effective evangelism.

Bales further challenged premillennialism based on its combination of church and state. He explained, "Premillennialists believe that the kingdom of the Messiah will be set up at the second coming of Christ. It will be a theocracy in which the church and state will be combined."[30]

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[29] Bales, *Kingdom*, 86.

[30] Bales, *Prophecy*, 5.

Bales was not a separatist like Fanning and Lipscomb, nor did he view culture with the optimism of Campbell. But he believed the church's role in the world was to expand the borders of Christ's kingdom. As the nations are evangelized, everything is brought under Christ's rule through the church. Premillennialism undermined the church's motivation since the church is simply a placeholder until Christ's kingdom commences at his second coming. Those for the postponement theory would argue, "The church was prophesied on the condition that the kingdom was rejected."[31] According to Boll, God withdrew his offer to Israel when the Jews rejected Jesus. This is why Jesus instead began speaking of the kingdom in parables.[32]

Foy E. Wallace, Jr.

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. did more to combat premillennialists in Churches of Christ than any other person.[33] He was probably the most influential preacher in Churches of Christ in the 1930s and 1940s. From 1930-1934 he served as editor of the *Gospel Advocate* and later

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[31] Bales, *Kingdom*, 47.

[32] Boll, *Kingdom*, 41-42.

[33] Although E. R. Harper, a Little Rock preacher, may have had as much or more influence on the premillennial controversy in Arkansas.

established two other papers for the purpose of fighting premillennialism.[34] The content of the arguments against premillennialism offered by Wallace and Bales were essentially the same, but their styles differed considerably.[35] This may be attributed to several things including differences in personalities. Whereas Wallace was primarily a preacher and editor, Bales was a college professor. Wallace's education came primarily from mentor preachers and Bales had much formal education. But most importantly, Bales was an heir of the apocalyptic tradition and Wallace exemplified the fighting style of the Texas Tradition.

Although Wallace and Bales once adhered to and later abandoned the pacifist position, their reasons and circumstances differed. Ultimately, however, their shared belief that premillennialism undermined the legitimacy of the church came to dominate their theological reasoning for abandoning tenets which were tied to the apocalyptic worldview. Wallace called conscientious objectors who sought alternative service during World War II "a freak

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[34] These were the *Gospel Guardian* (1935-1936) and the *Bible Banner* (1938-1949).

[35] Daniel Overton, "From Pacifism to Pearl Harbor: The Sharp Decline of Pacifism in the Churches of Christ Exemplified by the Changed Mind of Foy Esco Wallace, Jr." (master's thesis, Harding School of Theology, 2016).

speciman [sic] of humanity" who had a "dwarfed conscience."[36] Wallace accused Boll of trying to "disguise" his teaching and being purposefully vague when discussing the premillennial question.[37] Bales advocated for judging actions and teachings, not motives.[38] But as we will see in the coming chapters, Bales did inherit some of Wallace's fighting style. The polemics of the premillennial controversy left a permanent mark on public discourse in Churches of Christ.

> The premillennial battle created attitudes, tactics, policies, procedures, precedents, and excesses which were to be employed in the forties and in the fifties, with reference to the issues of the times.[39]

In the story just presented, Boll represents the Tennessee Tradition while Wallace is an exemplary carrier of the Texas Tradition. Tennessee viewed the church as a manifestation of the kingdom but not identical to it.[40] The Texas Tradition did view the kingdom and the church as

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[36] Wallace quoted in Michael Casey, "Warriors against War: The Pacifists of the Churches of Christ in World War II," *Restoration Quarterly* 35:4 (1993): 165.

[37] Foy E. Wallace, "The Essential Point of Premillennialism-No. 2," *Bible Banner* 5 (Feb 1943). 2.

[38] For Bales's rules of engagement see his manual on debate, James D. Bales, *Christian, Contend for thy Cause* (Searcy, Bales's Book Club, 1949).

[39] David Edwin Harrell, *The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century: Homer Hailey's Personal Journey of Faith* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 63-64.

[40] *Global History*, 152.

equivalents and began to focus on restoring the church to purity. Tennessee relied on God's initiative to bring in the kingdom and special providence.[41] Though Bales initially represented the Tennessee Tradition, in some areas he transitioned to the Texas Tradition after his return to Harding in 1944. His politics largely followed the Texas Tradition which forced out some of the Tennessean aspects of grace and special providence. But Bales maintained some of his roots in the Tennessee Tradition, most notably in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Bales's desire for a renewed earth through the counter-cultural practices of the Tennessee Tradition or apocalyptic worldview were casualties of his battle with premillennialism. He too mistakenly conflated the apocalyptic perspective with dispensational premillennialism. As he argued against premillennial aspirations for the Jewish return to Palestine, he came to view all discussions of earth in Revelation pessimistically. Bales understood the spiritualized thousand-year reign as a present reality that all Christians should work to increase.

As we will see in the next two chapters, Bales believed the church's role was to expand the kingdom by

[41] For more on the differences between the Texas and Tennessee Traditions see, *Global History*, 151-155, 162.

combating any perceived threat to it. Bales said, "In this present reign Christ is to conquer all of his enemies" and he believe this would be accomplished, in part, through the work of the church. Even so, as Bales viewed the world in light of the perceived threat of communism he said he was, "convinced that regardless of what the immediate future holds, the church will spread throughout the world."[42]

[42] James D. Bales, *Two Worlds: Christianity and Communism: Study Course for Youth and Adults* (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, n.d.), 84.

Chapter V

Bales as an Anti-Communist Force

Although he never fully embraced the Texas Tradition, Bales's increasing willingness to engage the political issues of his day is indicative of his loss of the apocalyptic worldview. He engaged communism the most fiercely. The *Encyclopedia of Millennialism* lists communism as a millennial movement, citing its call for dramatic changes in society, charismatic leaders, and the zeal of its followers which resemble other millennial movements.[1] Though communism differs dramatically from the premillennialism found in Churches of Christ in the early to mid-twentieth century, Bales saw similar bases of argument against both. There was at least some desire to tie the issues together in Churches of Christ at large as L. L. Brigance, a Bible teacher at Freed-Hardeman, played on the cultural fears of the day and coined the term, "Bollshevism."[2] Bales said of communism that it "also teaches that there is a world to come and that life has

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[1] Diana Tumminia, "Communism," *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, ed. Richard Landes (New York: Routledge, 2000), 100.

[2] *The Stone-Campbell Movement: Global History,* eds. D. Newell Williams, Douglas Foster, and Paul Blowers (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 155.

meaning because one can help bring into existence this ideal world."[3] As with the premillennial controversy, Bales was skeptical of ideas and efforts to bring about a future society in which the church and Christians individually were not involved. But unlike the premillennial controversy, Bales was critical of communism as an atheistic theory which offered the material world as the only reality. Instead, Bales said, "there is a future for the church both on earth and in eternity."[4] Communism only looked toward a future on earth, one of revolution in the immediate future, eventually leading to a classless society. Christians, on the other hand, look toward the spread of the kingdom in the immediate future and eternal life in the eventual future. Bales's concern with communism was widespread among American evangelicals who saw the Cold War, "as a zero-sum conflict between incommensurate options: the godless Soviets and the Judeo-Christian democratic West."[5] Bales's engagement of communism is a

[3] James D. Bales, *Two Worlds – Christianity and Communism: Study Course for Youth and Adults* (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1965), 77. Hereafter, *Two Worlds*.

[4] *Two Worlds*, 84.

[5] Thomas, S. Kidd, *America's Religious History: Faith, Politics, and the Shaping of a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 212.

clear indicator of the demise of apocalyptic sectarianism in Churches of Christ.

In his loss of the apocalyptic worldview, Bales's journey differed somewhat from that of his contemporaries and predecessors. David Edwin Harrell lists Bales among the most committed pacifists in Churches of Christ during World War II. Whereas Foy E. Wallace and others moved from pacifism to militarism during the war, Bales maintained his pacifism through it. It was the rise of communism, and its atheism, which caused him to change his position.[6] As noted, George Benson's influence on Bales's transition is difficult to overstate. Therefore, the issues surrounding the premillennial controversy and its effect on the apocalyptic worldview and Harding College need to be revisited from a slightly different angle. The answer to Benson's fundraising woes came in the form of the National Education Program, for which Bales produced many materials advocating for free enterprise economics and constitutional democracy. The interconnection between various tenets of the apocalyptic worldview, such as pacifism and the

[6] For Foy E. Wallace's move from pacifism to militarism see Daniel Overton, "From Pacifism to Pearl Harbor: The Sharp Decline of Pacifism in the Churches of Christ Exemplified by the Changed Mind of Foy Esco Wallace, Jr." (master's thesis, Harding School of Theology, 2016), 88-105.

Christian's relation to the government, are also revisited as they related to Bales's fight against communism.

Bales, Benson, and the NEP

J. N. Armstrong's refusal to condemn R. H. Boll during the premillennial controversy made fundraising among Churches of Christ challenging. Many simply would not donate to Harding because they (rightly) suspected Armstrong of being a premillennialist. Benson's need to raise money for the school and disdain for communism converged in his National Education Program. The NEP served as a sort of product that Benson could sell. Sometimes called the propaganda wing of Harding College, the NEP consisted of Benson and like-minded faculty (including Bales) who produced material defending the American way of life through speeches, radio shows, "freedom forums," articles, film strips, and more.[7] His success in raising money is tied to his connections with wealthy businessmen who gave generously to the school. Benson often gave speeches to civic groups and businessmen on topics related to free enterprise.[8] Those who thought Benson's efforts

[7]A complete list (and some examples) can be found in the George S. Benson Files, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR and Donald P. Garner, "George S. Benson: Conservative, Anti-Communist, Pro-Americanism Speaker" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 76.

benefitted their business then gave to the college in turn. Two things deeply affected Benson between his time as a student under Armstrong's tutelage at Harper College and Harding and his return from China to become president of Harding. The first was his interaction with Chinese communism. Upon arriving in China, the Bensons saw first-hand the struggle between the warlords and communists who were vying for control. In one instance they were hassled by communist soldiers who threatened to destroy the supplies they were carrying to an orphanage. The Bensons came under constant danger when the communists took control of their town and posted anti-American and anti-Christian propaganda.[9] They fled to Hong Kong to escape the persecution.[10] This experience changed Benson.

He came to believe that Christianity and democratic capitalism mutually benefitted one another. Benson claimed, "the Christian religion constitutes the foundation upon which our great system of free competitive enterprise and our representative constitutional government have

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[8] Garner, 70.

[9] George Benson, "The National Education Program," George S. Benson Files, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR, 1. See also L. Edward Hicks, *Sometimes in the Wrong, but Never in Doubt: George S. Benson and the Education of the New Religious Right* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 7-8.

[10] Ibid, 9.

functioned."[11] Of communists he believed, "America was the number one enemy because she was the strongest of all of the capitalist nations and because she was distinctly a Christian nation."[12] From here, Benson's theology became intertwined with his American cultural values. He often sought to root his political beliefs in the Bible, stating,

> God created this world and the fullness thereof. He ordained certain definite, unchangeable laws. He prescribed the function of man in this world. When man discovers God's plan and works in harmony with the principles of this Creator, he finds his own function in life and achieves success. To whatever extent man works in harmony with the principles and aims of the Master, this world is a paradise.[13]

To ground his defense of the free enterprise system, Benson started with ancient Israel's land laws (specifically the Jubilee Year). In a speech in 1951 he said, "So God not only arranged for private ownership but also arranged for the continuation of private ownership of property."[14] Also, in a speech to the Rotary Club, Benson detailed the dangers of communism saying, it will "Take away our religion. Take

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[11] Ibid, 21. George S. Benson, "Our Part in this Present Emergency," April 9, 1942, George S. Benson Files, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR, 4.

[12] Benson, "National Education Program," 3.

[13] Benson quoted in Garner, 127.

[14] Ibid.

away our constitutional government. Take away our private enterprise economy. Take away all the things that we really love and have made America the foremost nation in the world."[15] Benson's activities as president of Harding and director of the NEP soon became difficult to distinguish. A 1961 article in the *New York Times* drew the conclusion that "for all practical purposes they are one and the same."[16]

The second experience that helped chart Benson's course as president occurred upon his return to the States. When he left home in 1925 the country was economically prosperous, and morale was high. The Great Depression, however, occurred while Benson was in China and he returned to a decidedly different situation. The National Recovery Act, Agricultural Recovery Act and Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal did not impress Benson. He believed that these things smacked of collectivism and, thus, communism. Scarred by his experiences in China, he came to connect his economic, political, and religious teachings. He came to see himself as a "missionary" to the American people on the topics of "the correctness of the American form of

[15] Garner, 219.

[16] Ibid, 72-73.

government," its economic system, and "the actual goals of the Communists."[17]

> Christians must take the lead in the fight against the power of darkness. For instance, only Christians can understand what is really at stake. Only they know the importance of faith in God and importance of enjoying the providence of God. Only Christians really have the answer in this present crisis, and Christians must be concerned because we are Our Brother's keeper.[18]

Others caught onto the religious/political connection as well. In 1948, a writer for the *Chicago Tribune* said,

> Like the Biblical heroes it reverently emulates, and with little more in original weapons than the jawbone of an Arkansas mule, little Harding is smiting mightily the Philistines of socialism, communism, planned economy, and anti-Americanism.[19]

Benson vehemently opposed government work and welfare programs, like those instituted during the Great Depression. He did not view favorably the decreased unemployment rate which was a result of these programs. When talking about his increased speaking opportunities following the war, he said,

> I thought it good to use that opportunity to help our young people, in particular, to understand better our American heritage and what really had brought prosperity to our country. I wanted young people to understand that the Christian religion

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[17] Benson, "National Education Program," 3. See also Hicks, 23-25.

[18] Benson quoted in Garner, 129.

[19] Stevens, 149. Frank Hughes, "College is a champion of U. S. Way," *Chicago Daily Tribune* January 20, 1948.

> was the foundation upon which we built the character of our nation. I wanted them to believe in the living God and His Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and I wanted them to understand about our Constitutional government which guaranteed the rights to own property and other fundamental rights that added to our pleasure and added to our well-being.[20]

In one speech, he tied Christianity and the government especially close. He claimed that America's forefathers had a specifically orthodox faith that *resulted in* a constitutional government and free enterprise economy. Benson said these things were "very important" to America's industrial achievements.

> First, was the influence and power of the Christian religion. Our early forefathers believed in God, believed in Jesus, the Christ; believed in the inspiration of the Bible and believed in a future life. These principles were taught to children in the homes and in the schools. Generation after generation grew-up believing in God and accepting the Bible standard of morals. This led to the adoption of a Union under a constitutional form of government and to an economic structure which we called private enterprise. It meant freedom for men to own property, freedom to dream their own dreams and undertake to fulfill them and freedom to compete in all fields of endeavor.[21]

Benson sought a master's degree at the University of Chicago, where he heard professors advocate for socialism

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[20] George S. Benson, "The Beginning of the National Education Program," George S. Benson Files, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR, 3.

[21] George S. Benson, "Three-In-One," George S. Benson Files, Brackett Library, Harding University, Searcy, AR, 2.

and call for an end to capitalism. This added to his desire to make Harding College a player in the fight against big government, for free-enterprise, and anti-communism.[22] Benson's fundraising success, growing connections with business leaders, and ideological stand granted him a growing audience. In 1941 he even testified before the House Ways and Means Committee, advocating for these ideals.[23] In a radio interview Benson praised American democracy for its ability to provide relative luxury to people of moderate means. He said he testified before the committee to advocate for a reduction in spending so that these things might be preserved.[24] Benson called for economizing the federal budget in order to pay for WWII.[25] Two days after the broadcast a college bulletin was released containing only articles about Benson's work in the political/economic realm, including praise of his appearance on the aforementioned radio program.[26]

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[22] Stevens, 28.

[23] Stevens, 31.

[24] George S. Benson and Wesley E. Disney, "America at the Crossroads", October 30, 1941, The University of Toledo Digital Repository, Ward M. Canaday Center.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Harding Bulletin 17:6A (November 1941). Retrieved from http://scholarworks.harding.edu/hubulletins/33.

When Clifton L. Ganus, Jr. succeeded him as president he continued Benson's emphases begun in the NEP. But the program faced growing criticism eventually leading to the college trying to distance itself from it. Some of this criticism came from within the faculty which caused Ganus to issue this memo to the faculty,

> If faith in God as our Creator, Father and Judge, belief in constitutional government and private ownership of property as opposed to socialism and communism, preference for law and order to anarchy and rebellion and a choice of democracy as a better way than fascism and totalitarianism be political then so be it. Show me a teacher or an educational institution that is not 'political.'[27]

This is, in summary, the backdrop for Bales's work against communism, including his work with the NEP.

Bales's Fight Against Communism

Bales's understanding of the biblical instructions to government and the Christian's relationship to it is also necessary background for his fight against communism. Bales argued that government is ordained by God and that all Christians are subject to government. But he added an important qualifier, that governments are ordained by God for certain tasks. If they do not adhere to God's

[27] Clifton L. Ganus, Jr., July 31, 1969, "Dr. Ganus to the Harding Faculty," James D. Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC1256), University of Arkansas Library Fayetteville.

instructions for how governments should operate, the Christian may oppose those aspects which are against God's law. Because communism was atheistic and opposed the church, Bales felt justified in opposing communism.

First, Bales argued that a Christian's "loyalty to God is the supreme loyalty in the light of which other loyalties are both sustained and limited"[28] Bales gleaned the following points from Romans 13:1-7 about the Christian and civil government. 1) God ordained an ordered government rather than anarchy. 2) The government's God-given purpose is to punish evil and promote good. 3) Christians are subject to civil government. 4) The Christian's obedience is qualified. "Our obedience must be the divine mandate under which the government operates."[29] The existence of a government is not proof that it is ordained by God. God ordained governments are only those fulfilling their God ordained tasks (i.e. punishing evil and promoting good). Governments, like individuals, may apostatize. Christians are not bound to obey governments that do not complete the function which God commanded them because "a lawless government is not contemplated in Romans 13."[30]

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[28] James D. Bales, "Not of this World," *Abilene Christian College Bible Lectures* (1962), 444. Hereafter, "Not of This World."

[29] Ibid, 445.

Those who held to the apocalyptic worldview did not vote. When Bales decided the Christian had the right to vote, the decision that he could voice political views in other ways soon followed. Bales held that a Christian should not consider himself barred from voting on the basis that a vote obligates one to participate in the vengeance function of the government. This does not follow for several reasons. The government itself does not view it this way (a nonvoter may be drafted into war or the voluntary soldier may choose not to vote). Scriptural obedience to the government is not based on voting. The government will function in its role whether one votes or not, therefore, it is more preferable that the Christian voice is added to the vote than not. Lastly, if it is wrong to vote, it logically follows that it is wrong to express any opinion concerning the government or its agents.[31] When answering whether or not he as a Christian could vote Bales said,

> I decided that either I had no right to express any opinion concerning any official, or that I also had the right to express my opinion at the ballot box where my vote as well as my voice would be for or against certain candidates.

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[30] Ibid, 445-446.

[31] Ibid, 448.

Further, Bales believed that there were times when a Christian was duty-bound to vote, such as deciding whether a county permitted the sale of alcohol.[32]

Bales also moved away from pacifism. He said the command to love one's enemies is limited; it is superseded by other explicit commands which hold the Christian to higher obligations. One of these is the obligation to care for one's family. A man may not give his personal property to an enemy, for instance, because that property is used to care for one's family.[33] This extends to the use of force to stop evil, for in not doing so one is a "passive contributor to evil."[34] His eventual conclusion is that Christians may employ self-defense, contact the police, and kill if necessary. But this does not negate one's love for their enemies. "The fact that one obligation may transcend and limit another obligation does not make meaningless the lesser obligation."[35] These two tenets of the apocalyptic worldview, voting and use of force, fell first in Bales's thinking. Bales then continued his transition toward increased political involvement that reached its height in

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[32] Ibid, 448-449.

[33] Ibid, 450-451.

[34] Ibid, 453.

[35] Ibid, 452.

his anticommunist rhetoric. At times, the line between his faith and patriotism seemed blurred. Benson made this transition before Bales and with a harder bent, but Bales was not far behind.

Bales believed that although Christianity did not present a blueprint for a particular economic system, free enterprise was most in harmony with its principles.[36] The church may be prevented from spreading its message via the press or radio in countries where the state controls such things.[37] The free enterprise system, therefore, was the best economic system for the freedom of the church.[38] Further, although Christianity could exist under any system of government, it would, Bales argued, eventually undermine dictatorships.[39] "The Communists are economic determinists who believe that one's nature is shaped by the economic system and one's relationship to it."[40] The system viewed

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[36] James D. Bales, "Christ and the Problem of Free Enterprise" in *Harding College Lectures* (Searcy, Harding College Press, 1952), 121. Hereafter, "Christ and Free Enterprise." See also James D. Bales, "Why Be Interested in Our Free Enterprise System," 98 *Firm Foundation* (March 3, 1981): 5

[37] "Free Enterprise," 129.

[38] Ibid, 120.

[39] James D. Bales, "Reactionaries?," James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

[40] James D. Bales, "Communist Code of Conduct," *Voice of Freedom* 30 (January 1, 1982): 9.

man as a product of his economic status instead of his status before God. He is a "result of his place in the evolutionary and social hierarchy." Bales routinely defended himself and the NEP against criticisms of being "ultra-right," fascists, or Nazis by lumping those groups in with communists as well. "Nazism was National Socialism with the master race taking the place of the master class."[41] Bales attacked any political or social theory which did not acknowledge God. "Evolution sees man as a solely natural product of evolutionary forces."[42] Bales then concluded that the American system was the only one that view man with the appropriate dignity. "Democracy is the only form of government which affirms that man is made in the image of God, capable of moral, logical, and rational reasoning.[43]

Bales and the NEP faced criticisms from outside and within Churches of Christ, including current and former faculty at Harding. Bales acknowledged the scrutiny of the NEP by Robert Meyers[44] and others who complained that Benson

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[41] James D. Bales, "Democracy and God," *Voice of Freedom* 31 (October 1, 1983): 143.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] See discussion of Robert Meyers in chapter 3.

was trying to identify the church with the politically radical right wing and that this "was not in harmony with the traditional view that the church should be detached from politics."[45] Bales argued against such criticisms by saying that while an institution may take a particular stand politically, churches should not. Neither should such political stances divide Christians in fellowship.[46] Although Bales said, "We are to seek first the kingdom and God's righteousness but this does not mean we are not concerned with the conditions under which we and our children live."[47] The fight for economic freedom had always been about fighting for religious freedom.[48]

> We are not making peace with the world when we maintain that Christians ought to be interested in that system of government and that economic system which has provided us with the greatest freedoms and the greatest amount of goods wherewith to provide for our own and to help others. If this is making peace with the world, how much more so is our critic who advocates more and more state intervention, with its police power…into the lives of the people to bring about the various changes and goals which he deems good. He is asking the State… to bring about those changes in society which he as a Christian thinks ought to be brought about.[49]

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[45] "Reactionaries?"

[46] Ibid.

[47] James D. Bales, "Observations – They Died for Our Freedom," James David Bales, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 1.

[48] "Reactionaries?"

[49] Ibid.

Increasingly, Bales's rhetoric about communism, the American way of life, and the NEP sounded like that of Benson's. Americanism and Christianity became more closely tied, with Bales stating "historical Americanism…includes faith in God, Constitutional government, and the free enterprise system."[50] And like Benson, Bales began to make free enterprise economy an almost logical conclusion of "faith in God as the source of man's rights and duties, individual responsibility, and the moral principles of the Bible."[51] Likewise, Bales drew direct a correlation between communism and "atheism, dialectical materialism, economic determinism, and moral relativism."[52]

Bales's primary arguments against communism were doctrinal. The eschatological visions of Christianity and communism were too divergent to coexist. Communism offered a doctrine of the fall and redemption of man which was wholly different than the Bible: "evil arose when private property came into existence. Marxian socialism teaches that the abolition of private property…will redeem man. His

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] James D. Bales, *Forty-Two Years on the Firing Line* (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1977), 119.

nature will be changed."[53] He observed, "They demand these things of communists which Christ demands of Christians."[54] Perhaps blinded by his own faithfulness to American civil religion Bales argued,

> I consider civil religion, which makes the State God or the special and exclusive instrument of God, as a form of idolatry. Because I oppose civil religion, I oppose communism. It is a form of religious internationalism.[55]

Bales believed speaking against communism was kingdom work.

> When I work for the perpetuation and more extensive application of the principles on which America was built, I am also seeking first the kingdom of heaven, although everyone who works for the U.S. is not trying to advance the kingdom…. In my anti-communism work I am seeking first the kingdom.[56]

Lastly we should also note that although Bales's writings and speeches for the NEP were more ideological than were Benson's, even he noted, "the National Education Program has been the reason that the majority of the money that has

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[53] James D. Bales, "Communism and Religious Nationalism," James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995, University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville, 6. See "Christianity and Communism," in *Harding College Bible Lectures* (1961), 20-37. Unlike other Christian anticommunists of his day, Bales did not read communist actions into Revelation. This can be attributed to his amillennialism. However, Bales did associate with those who did, such as Herbert Philbrick of *I Led Three Lives* fame. See Veronica A. Wilson, "Anticommunism, Millenarianism and the Challenges of Cold War Patriarchy: The Many Lives of FBI Informant Herbert Philbrick," *American Communist History* 8:1 (2009):74-102. Philbrick was a speaker at the NEP's first Freedom Forum in 1962.

[54] "Communism and Religious Nationalism," 6.

[55] Ibid.

[56] James D. Bales, "Seeking First the Kingdom," Firm Foundation (October 13, 1981): 648.

come to Harding College has come."[57] The statement is an example of how Bales shifted away from the apocalyptic worldview's view of special providence.

Bales maintained that while an individual may advocate for a certain political outcome, the church should not. Individual Christians should, therefore, advocate for those political and economic systems that are more conducive to the church's free operation in the world. In this way, Bales fit his fight against communism into his eschatological vision. To fight for free enterprise and constitutional government was to fight for the church's ability to evangelize and expand the borders of Christ's kingdom on earth.

[57] Letter from James D. Bales to Joel Anderson November 30, 1961, James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

Chapter VI

Bales on Race and Civil Rights

Race, religion, politics are intricately interwoven issues in American life. The years following the Civil War saw a lull in religion's influence on American politics. But the rise of the Civil Rights Movement brought all three issues back together.[1] The connection is seen in the rhetoric of the Civil Rights activists and their detractors. As Bales sought to navigate these troubled waters the relationship between race, politics, and religion was a tense one. While Bales aggressively fought communism, he was reluctant to make public comments concerning racial inequality. The disparity is difficult to easily assess in view of his eschatological vision. Bales's vision included the church permeating all of society through evangelism. Bales wrote and spoke against communism as an individual but maintained that the church should not engage the issue institutionally. Bales's position on race is more nuanced and is difficult to categorize. Churches of Christ occupied a unique space in relation to the black freedom struggle of the 1960s. Key argues that the

[1] Mark Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 103.

relationship between blacks and whites in Churches of Christ is unique in that "racial identities were subordinated under the guise of Christian unity."[2] Indeed, Churches of Christ "appeared more genuinely interracial than any other southern sect."[3] Still, Churches of Christ were not immune to the racial tensions which existed in the culture and largely resisted involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Bales, while not opposed to the goals of the movement, did criticize the means by which Civil Rights leaders sought to accomplish those goals. He made this clear in his *Martin Luther King Story*, published the year before King was assassinated. Bales's other writings to and about black church leaders indicate that he was not overtly racist or a militant segregationist.

Bales believed in the gradual undoing of segregation, often deferring the decision to integrate Harding to the administration. But Bales also supported the work of R. N. Hogan and was an admirer of Marshall Keeble. The complexity of Bales's views on race and Civil Rights should be

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[2] Barclay Key, "Race and Restoration: Churches of Christ and the African American Freedom Struggle" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2007), 12. Hereafter abbreviated "Race and Restoration." This chapter is heavily indebted to Key's works on race in Churches of Christ. Key has given the most thorough treatment of Bales anywhere, though it is confined to Bales's interaction with the Civil Rights Movement.

[3] Harrell quoted in "Race and Restoration," 23.

understood in at least three ways. The first way was his relationship with George Benson. Benson was a segregationist, and Bales deferred to his judgment on the issue.

> When is it time [to integrate]? I do not know. I think we should be happy that our brethren of various races, except the Negro, have been welcomed here [at Harding] and without disturbance from Community or parents. I doubt now is the time with all the excitement about Little Rock.[4]

The second was his preoccupation with law, order, and preserving status quo for the stability of society. Third, gradual integration of the races facilitated evangelism better than sudden integration.[5] Bales advocated that churches not take political stands on racial issues as these could be divisive and hinder the work of the church.[6] Bales devoted considerably more time and energy to communism than race relations because of this eschatological vision. To Bales, communism was necessarily atheist, so he fought communism to provide a way for the church to evangelize. He viewed racism as an individual sin problem. Each individual's heart would have to be changed. Evangelism was the primary task of the church and took

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[4] Bales quoted in "Race and Restoration," 56-57.

[5] "Race and Restoration,", 60.

[6] Ibid.

priority over all else. Bales, therefore, committed himself to the fight against communism to ensure the church's freedom to evangelize believing that evangelism would erase racism.

Context in Arkansas and at Harding

Following the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, schools across the segregated South began formulating plans to integrate their facilities. In 1957, the Little Rock School District began implementing their gradual desegregation plan that would culminate in full integration by 1963. When nine African American students attempted to enter Little Rock's Central High School on September 4, 1957, they were turned away by members of the Arkansas National Guard under orders of Governor Orval Faubus. In the following days, the Guardsmen were removed, a large mob grew outside the school, and four black reporters were beaten outside the school. Little Rock Mayor Woodrow Mann then asked President Eisenhower for assistance. Eisenhower responded with an executive order sending units from the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division to Central High and federalizing the Arkansas National Guard. The "Little Rock Nine" finally entered Central High School on September 25, 1957 under escort by these troops.

These events made Arkansas a popular symbol of resistance to the racial integration of public facilities.[7]

At Harding, desegregation was delayed but less dramatic. Joel Anderson was a student at Harding 1960-1964 and described himself upon his arrival at the college as "at one with most Church of Christ members across the South believing ours was the one true faith, strongly anti-communist, and oblivious of any concerns about the place of African Americans in American society,"[8] Anderson was the student body president his senior year, during which the college integrated.[9] The week prior to the start of school Benson asked to meet with the student association and told them that three black students would be enrolling in the Fall. Anderson noted that the announcement was "out of the blue." At the same meeting Benson remarked that the student body had been ready for integration for some time but that the supporters of the school had resisted. This indicted

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[7] For more background information on the crisis at Central High see, Karen Anderson. *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). For more context about racial desegregation of schools in Arkasas see also, Jeffery Stewart, "The Integration of the Pulaski County Special School District, 1954-1965," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 78:2 (Summer 2019): 111-139.

[8] Joel E. Anderson, "Civil Rights Activism during the Ole Miss Crisis and Desegregation at Harding College" (paper presented at the Christian Scholars Conference, Nashville, TN, June 8, 2012), 2.

[9] Joel Anderson, interview by author, North Little Rock, September 24, 2019. Anderson, "Ole Miss," 1.

that Benson's decision was primarily financial. Integration at Harding came smoothly when it finally arrived. When the announcement was made in chapel, the student body gave a standing ovation.[10]

Anderson also recalled that there were some among the Harding faculty during his time as a student who quietly condemned segregation. Those who helped change his mind on segregation were James Atteberry and Jimmy Allen, among others.[11] In his autobiography Allen said, "I never marched during the Civil Rights Movement. However, I constantly used the pulpit to combat racism."[12] Richard Hughes was also a student at Harding during this time but said even though Harding's campus in Searcy is approximately 60 miles from Central High School, "it might as well have been on Mars."[13] These statements illustrate the atmosphere at Harding even nine years after the crisis at Central High.[14]

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[10] Anderson interview. Anderson, "Ole Miss," 4.

[11] Anderson, "Ole Miss," 2. For more on James Atteberry see chapter three of this thesis.

[12] Jimmy Allen, *Fire in My Bones: (Jeremiah 20:9)* (Searcy, AR, 2004), 112.

[13] Richard T. Hughes, "Understanding White Supremacy: Why We Must Hear Black Voices" (lecture, Central Arkansas Library System Ron Robinson Theater, Little Rock, AR, June 11, 2019).

[14] Barclay Key, "On the Periphery of the Civil Rights Movement: Race and Religion at Harding College, 1945-1969 *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 68:3 (Autumn 2009): 284.

Such a lack of awareness seems odd given the events on campus in 1957. Just a few months after the crisis in Little Rock, 946 of the 986 students and 99 members of the faculty, staff, and administration signed a statement saying,

> A number of members of the Harding community are deeply concerned about the problem of racial discrimination. Believing that it is wrong for Christians to make among people distinctions which God has not made, they sincerely desire that Harding College make clear to the world that she firmly believes in the principles of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Further, the signatories asked the administration for action without regard for social consequences, stating they were,

> ready to accept as members of the Harding community all academically and morally qualified applicants, without regard to arbitrary distinctions such as color or social level; that they will treat such individuals with the consideration and dignity appropriate to human beings created in the image of God; and that they will at all times face quietly, calmly, patiently, and sympathetically any social pressures intensified by this action.[15]

This campaign was led by faculty member Robert Meyers.[16] Although Harding lagged behind other institutions, it was the first private college in Arkansas to integrate. Later,

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[15] "Results of Recent Poll on Racial Integration Show Students Attitudes," *The Bison*, November 14, 1957.

[16] Anderson, "Ole Miss," 4. See chapter three of this thesis for more on Meyers.

as a faculty member, Anderson petitioned the Harding faculty to vote for Faubus' opponent so that a "breakup of the political power structure which has grown up in Arkansas" might be realized.[17] Bales also endorsed one of Faubus' opponents, Jim Johnson, noting that, "he assured me that he would treat the races equally."[18]

Bales on Martin Luther King, Jr.

The events at Central High and at Harding give us some context for Bales's subsequent words on the Civil Rights Movement. His book on Martin Luther King was primarily an indictment against King's associations with perceived communists and communist organizations and King's advocacy of civil disobedience.[19] Bales labeled King an "apostle of anarchy, apostacy, and appeasement."[20] Though from the onset

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[17] Joel Anderson to the Harding Faculty, July 22, 1966, "Note to Colleagues Regarding Arkansas Governor's Race," James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

[18] James D. Bales, "Controversy," James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville. See also John Kirk, "The Election that Changed Arkansas Politics," *Arkansas Times*, March 28, 2012, https://arktimes.com/news/cover-stories/2012/03/28/the-election-that-changed-arkansas-politics

[19] James D. Bales, "Anarchy," James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

[20] James D. Bales, *The Martin Luther King Story* (Tulsa: Christian Crusade Publications, 1967), 8. Hereafter abbreviated *MLK Story*. By "appeasement," he referred to King's actions and statements which he believed aligned with communist ideals (i.e. opposition to the Vietnam War).

he insisted that the work dealt with "ideas and actions, and not with racial backgrounds."[21] Bales accused King of adopting a "social gospel" stating, "thus we see that into the field of religion socialism not only permeated but took organizational form. The social gospel, we must remember, was socialistic."[22] Bales connected King and several other Civil Rights leaders to socialism. Among these were the founders of the NAACP, the first president of the National Urban League, John Lewis, and Malcolm X.

> It is not without significance that so many of the solutions to our racial problems, which are advanced by some of these leaders, are those which would increase the centralization of power in Washington, and thus increase socialism in America. The Booker T. Washington aim of self-help is too much oriented toward the free-enterprise system to appeal to socialists.[23]

Bales said he was concerned with King and the Civil Rights Movement he led because he feared it was a tool for communists "to undermine and weaken our country so that they can take over."[24] Though he admitted he did not believe King was himself a member of the Communist Party, Bales

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[21] *MLK Story*, 8.

[22] James D. Bales, *Sketches form the History of Collectivism* (Searcy, Ark: Bales Bookstore, 1965), 47. Hereafter abbreviated *History of Collectivism.* See also, Herbert Philbrick and James D. Bales, *Communism and Race in America* (Searcy, Ark: Bales Bookstore, 1965).

[23] History *of Collectivism,* 42-43.

[24] James D. Bales to Cled Wimbish, James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville, 8a.

wondered if he might be a "pink pacifist."[25] As one would imagine, Bales's book drew criticism. Bales was chided for his association with Billy James Hargis.[26] Hargis was the founder of a ministry called Christian Crusade Against Communism. His ministry was fraught with controversy, as Hargis was accused of being anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic, supporting racial segregation, and having sexual relations with male and female students at the college he ran. Haymes wrote the following about Bales's book:

> He is amazed by the emotional response his method engenders; his book about Dr. King, published less than a year before the assassination, was the focus of a protest by black students at Harding in 1969, and caustically criticized by black Church [sic] leaders. But Dr. Bales was undaunted. "Only a bigoted racist," he had written, would identify his work as racist.[27]

Another criticism came quickly after King's death. Cled Wimbish was a preacher in Port Arthur, Texas who, in a letter written to Bales, encouraged him to take the book off the market. Wimbish was given a copy of it by a church member following a sermon he preached mourning King's death and during which he encouraged his hearers to join the nonviolent movement.[28] He also complained that Bales had

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[25] Bales to Wimbish, 4a.

[26] Ibid, 15.

[27] Donas Jackson Haymes III, "A Nice Guy," *Integrity* 9 (August 8, 1977): 47.

chosen Hargis' Christian Crusade to publish the work.[29] Wimbish feared the book served no other purpose than to make whites fear African Americans which would delay the extension of rights to them. He commented further that he could see where the book could have helped a person justify King's killing.[30] Wimbish closed with this plea:

> You could do a wonderful thing, Brother Bales!... by publicly stating that [King] himself preached against Communism…. And you could publicly urge Christians to accept the Bible teaching that any kind of racial discrimination is wrong…. AND PEOPLE WOULD LISTEN![31]

Bales then responded,

> I feel it is racist for one to exempt such a one from public criticism because of his race. I have criticized people of the white race and could see no reason why Dr. King should be exempt because of his race.[32]

Instead Bales said he wrote the book against King because of his association with communists, his modernism, his methods which undermined law and order, and his religious errors.[33] Although Bales mentions numerous

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[28] Cled Wimbish, "On the Death of Martin Luther King, Jr.," James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

[29] Cled Wimbish to James D. Bales, July 1, 1968, James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville, 3.

[30] Wimbish to Bales, 3.

[31] Ibid, 4.

[32] Bales to Wimbish, 2.

disagreements with King, the work is almost exclusively a criticism of King's associations with those Bales deemed communist. Still, Bales lamented King's assassination saying it "served the cause of racial hatred and helped the communists and not America."[34]

On another occasion Bales responded to various criticisms against himself, Harding College, and the NEP on race at one time.

> We are accused of hostility "to social reform, welfare programs, state intervention in the economy, labor unions, racial integration, disturbers of the status quo, and those who have turned the world upside down." Is one against reform because he does not advocate certain ways of trying to bring about the reform? Is a person non-progressive because he does not automatically turn to Washington for the solution of problems?[35]

Interestingly, Bales said he did not object to the Civil Rights Movement itself. "Sometimes people confuse one's objection to certain methods and means and thinks that one object [sic] to goals which in themselves are good."[36] That communists had infiltrated the Civil Rights Movement did not cause Bales to condemn it. "This is no more

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[33] Ibid, 10.

[34] Ibid, 12.

[35] Bales, "Reactionaries?" James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville, 283.

[36] Bales to Wimbish, 5.

condemnation of the civil rights movement than it is a condemnation of religion to say that the Communists have penetrated religious movements."[37]

Bales and Black Church Leaders

In the 1940s Bales's Oakland, California church financially supported R. N. Hogan's traveling evangelistic work among black churches. Several letters from 1944 suggest that Bales was involved scheduling evangelistic meetings and raising additional financial support for the African American minister. In a letter back to Bales, Hogan wrote,

> I am sure thankful for the fine interest that you brethren are showing in the work of the Master among my group. I shall do my best to make such a showing that you will be proud that you are supporting this great work.[38]

Likewise, following Keeble's death in 1968, Bales wrote all the Christian colleges suggesting that a scholarship fund be setup for African American students in Keeble's honor. These two brief examples illustrate had at least some interest in contributing to the welfare of African

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[37] Ibid, 6.

[38] R. N. Hogan to James D. Bales, Jan 11, 1944, James David Bales Papers, 1914-1995 (MC 1256), University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville.

Americans. Two things are clear from Bales's correspondence with these black church leaders. First, his interactions were often paternalistic. Hogan repeatedly asked Bales for help getting out of scheduled meetings when he had overbooked himself or encountered a conflict. Hogan also explained himself to Bales regarding a doctrinal issue or a particular circumstance asking for Bales's direction. Second, his involvement in racial reconciliation was limited to the evangelization of the black race. Bales was an "example of the ambiguities and tensions within the minds of many whites."[39] He was also typical of Church of Christ leaders of his day, "spiritual equality, in the opinions of most whites, did not necessitate social, political, and economic equality."[40] Further, Key argues,

> his inability to perceive the pervasive effects of structural racism upon black opportunity left him indifferent to the social hardships faced by African Americans and alienated him from racially progressive whites.[41]

It may not have been that Bales was unable to perceive structural racism, but that he had no interest in engaging it due to his kingdom theology. Bales was not completely ignorant of moral injustices towards African Americans and

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[39] "Race and Restoration," 55.

[40] Ibid, 36.

[41] Ibid, 56.

believed they should be addressed. "Christians should be interested in reforms and in a thoughtful consideration of the means which bring about true reforms."[42] But Bales was skeptical of the methods employed by Civil Rights leaders stating,

> The first missionaries did not make it their goal in life to free the slaves, although through freeing men from slavery to sin the spiritual values preached by Christianity did undermine slavery ultimately.[43]

Bales also consistently lamented violence against African Americans.[44] He said he was "neither for nor against segregation" but maintained "that one without prejudice can, and should, take into consideration the attitude, customs and laws in the surrounding community."[45]

Bales claimed that the church should be looking in four directions: backward - patterning itself after the New Testament, inward – judging itself against the Scriptures, outward – with missionary zeal, and forward to Christ's coming and the heavenly inheritance.[46] Bales called the restoration principle the seed-line principle. Just as each

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[42] Bales in "Race and Restoration," 63.

[43] Ibid.

[44] "Race and Restoration," 58.

[45] Ibid, 59.

[46] James D. Bales, "The Restoration Principle Seed-Line Principle," *Gospel Advocate* 115:21 (May 24, 1973): 325.

seed produces after its own kind, so the New Testament produces New Testament Christians and a New Testament church.[47] The New Testament was both a pattern for church organization and personal faith.[48]

The multiethnic nature of the New Testament church escaped his vision for race relations because of his eschatological vision. We can trace this from his inheritance and abandonment of the apocalyptic worldview. The apocalyptic worldview retained that the church should remain separate from the world and the denominations. Bales agreed but understood that Christians had to engage the world in order to make a way for the evangelization of the world. Communism fit into that category, but race relations did not. Bales also admitted to the equality of all men before God but did not see social advocacy as an endeavor worth his attention because such issues required a change of heart. Attempting to change social institutions did not change the hearts of individuals, therefore, Bales thought increasing the borders of God's kingdom via evangelism a better way to combat racism. Converting the world to Christ

[47] Ibid.

[48] James D. Bales, "Covenant and Pattern," *Gospel Advocate* 115 (April 26, 1973): 266.

would, in his view, end racial discrimination if given enough time.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

Eschatology was formative for the development of Churches of Christ since their earliest days. Various eschatological themes, especially those related to Christ's present and future rule, have fundamentally shaped the fellowship's identity and, perhaps more importantly, its self-identity. The diverse millennial viewpoints taken by leaders within the movement continue to be essential points of inquiry for determining the past, present, and future of Churches of Christ. As such, the major eschatological shift that took place in the mind of James D. Bales is helpful for understanding the broader world of Churches of Christ. Bales directly inherited a version of the apocalyptic worldview that percolated through many of the movement's leaders. Among the most influential were Barton W. Stone, Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb, James A. Harding, and J.N. Armstrong.

The loss of the apocalyptic worldview at Harding College is traceable through the life of James D. Bales. Furthermore, the events at Harding are a microcosm for what was happening in Churches of Christ generally. When Bales returned to Harding to teach, he was fully in the

apocalyptic camp. But Benson's influence on him was profound and he gradually dropped many tenets of the apocalyptic worldview. We first noted how premillennialism was not a necessary part of the NBST, but that it became, and at times remains, conflated with it. In fact, as Wallace and others focused on attacking Boll's dispensationalism, they eventually turned their attention to all premillennialists in an effort to oust them from Churches of Christ. Armstrong and Harding College were caught in the crossfire. Because of suspicion among the churches, Benson was forced to solicit money from businesses. Whether Benson was ever a proponent of the apocalyptic worldview is unclear. His operation of the college, however, makes at least two things clear. First, he either jettisoned or never picked up the idea of special providence. Second, he was more interested in raising money to keep the school funded, than the doctrinal debates that engulfed the fellowship. Benson soon learned that his anti-communist messages resonated with potential donors from the business world and thus the NEP was born.

Bales was originally unsure of Benson's methods because it seemed to him that Benson was using the church to take political stances. Bales believed that the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God were starkly opposed.

However, Bales came to believe that the worldly kingdom could be used to expand God's kingdom. To do this, Bales drew a line between how individual Christians could engage culture and how the church should engage it. He fought communism because it was atheistic and made laws condemning the spread of religion. This he came to see as a legitimate use of the worldly kingdom to further the cause of the kingdom of God. But as an enculturated individual at the height of the Red Scare, Bales viewed the Civil Rights Movement as communistic. He approved of the movement's goals but questioned its methods and the associations of some Civil Rights leaders. His lamentations about violence done to African Americans and his support of black evangelists R. N. Hogan and Marshall Keeble show that he was not overtly racist. Instead, he viewed evangelism as the best remedy to racial problems. He did not see the fight against systemic racism as a legitimate endeavor of the church.

Bales held that God ordained the church to engage spiritual warfare and the state to engage in physical warfare. After his transition away from the apocalyptic worldview, Bales came to believe that in some cases, the state could aid the church's mission. In such cases, he advocated for this to be done. Though he always maintained

that it is better to be involved with the church's role in the world than the government's, a Christian should influence the state in whatever ways made possible. He viewed the church as God's kingdom in which all Christians are called to work. He believed in the ongoing strength and spread of the church and viewed the state as one agency by which to accomplish the Lord's work on earth. From the Texas Tradition Bales adopted an optimistic anthropology and ecclesiology. But Bales inherited his view of kingdom living from the Tennessee Tradition. This eventually turned him into a conservative political advocate.

Bales's spiritual journey helps explain present-day Churches of Christ. Though the Tennessee Tradition was largely overshadowed by the Texas Tradition when Wallace became editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, we see remnants in Bales and present-day Churches of Christ. The apocalyptic vision of Lipscomb, Harding, and Armstrong did not die completely but was modified, albeit very significantly, so that it could survive in the culture left behind by Wallace's attacks. My own sense is that the apocalyptic worldview is being revived in Churches of Christ. In many respects I hope this is true.

This thesis is a small representation of the work that needs to be done to understand Bales's theology. In

closing, I propose the following research inquiries into Bales's thought. First, the theme of eschatology as an orienting concern for Bales could be carried into his interactions with Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Seventh-day Adventists. Bales left us with a wealth of writings on these groups, which he largely refuted based on their millennial aspirations. Second, it is clear that Bales opposed any type of deconstructionism. In his writings, Bales most often advocated for the position that preserved existing institutions and maintained the *status quo*. In this thesis, it surfaced in his disdain for communism's call for revolution and his gradualism toward integrating the races. Other inquires could include analyses of his refutation of theological liberalism and evolution. Finally, various studies into Bales's theology, such as Christology or pneumatology would be profitable for understanding the theology of Churches of Christ in the twentieth century. Bales made a significant contribution to the fellowship's "word-only" controversy. In this case, Bales held onto his apocalyptic heritage, arguing against the word-only position and choosing not to accept the Texas Tradition.[1] There is much research left to be done to better

[1] Robert Kurka, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion: Why Restorationists Appear to Be out of the Mainstream," in *Evangelicalism*

understand Bales and Churches of Christ. I conclude this thesis with words from notes taken by one of Bales's students during his final lecture at Harding. "Build with gratitude on what others have done and don't destroy. The blessings we have in this country are ours to improve, not to destroy."[2] And I will add that the blessings we have in Churches of Christ are ours to improve, not to destroy.

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and the Stone-Campbell Movement, ed. William R. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002): 138-151. The word-only position holds that the Holy Spirit's engagement with the believer is through the reading of scripture, not through a personal indwelling.

[2] James G. Shelton, "The Last Class Lecture of J. D. Bales," copy in procession of author.

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